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OLD FRIENDS
AND NEW
ACQUAINTANCES
BY
AGNES STRICKLAND



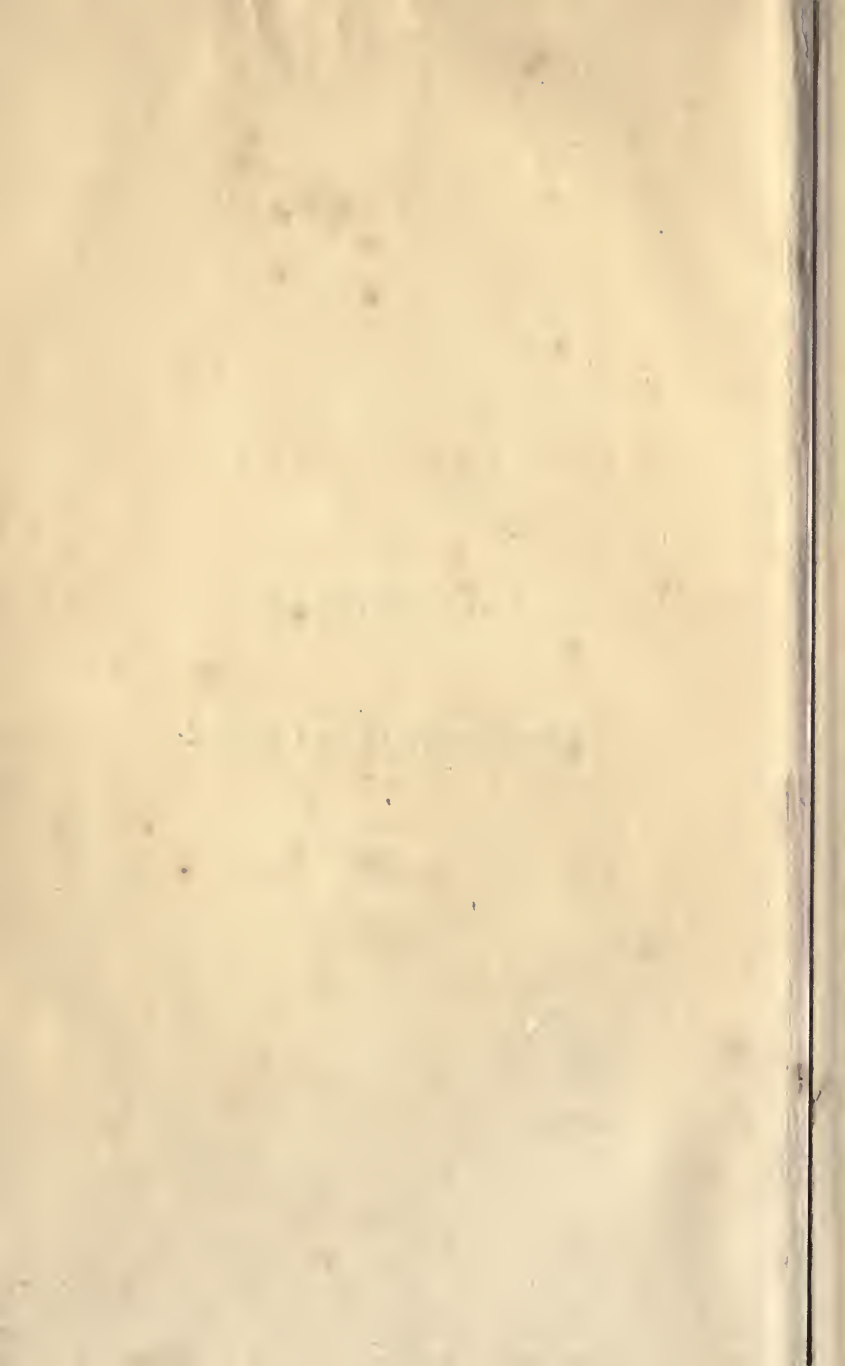
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OLD FRIENDS

AND

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.



OLD FRIENDS
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NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

BY
Agnes Strickland,
AUTHOR OF
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PREFACE.

It may be considered proper to explain, in reference to the title of this volume, that several of the tales, having previously appeared in various widely circulated periodicals, will, of course, be recognised, by many of my readers, as Old Friends, while the original sketches from my pen, in the same series, being now for the first time introduced to their attention, are, literally speaking, New Acquaintances. Should these be received with the like gratifying meed of popular favour with which the former were honoured, a Second Series of scenes and sketches of a similar

character may possibly be forthcoming, illustrative of life and its varieties, especially in the Eastern Counties, where the genuine type of the Saxon race is more peculiarly to be traced than in any other part of England.

A. S.

REYDON HALL, SUFFOLK,

January 17th, 1860.

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I.

THE SMUGGLERS' SONS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is a solitary little fishing town on the coast of Suffolk, which retains strong traces of having been once a Danish colony, especially in the complexions, names, and habits of some of its inhabitants. There are Swaines, Christians, Petersons, Magubs, Magnuses, Hacons, and Godwins; a sturdy, red-haired race, big-boned, tall, and choleric, and entirely devoted to nautical pursuits. Formerly they indulged, occasionally, in the piratical propensities of those marine monsters, the sea kings, from whom their descent is, in all probability, derived, till one of our Plantagenet sovereigns, out of his especial grace, granted the town the privilege of a gallows, to keep the unruly red-rovers in order. In later years they have

amended their manners and settled down into a worthy community of pilots and merchant-mariners, with the exception of a few incurable varlets, who employ their Scandinavian energies in the capacity of smugglers. On especial nights these bold adventurers skim the moonless waves, in long, sharp-keeled boats, painted of a bluish white, with oars of the same indistinct hue, and muffled rests, that they may neither be seen nor heard by the watchful coast-guard, when they put off to meet the loaded lugger from the Dutch shore, in the hope of landing her contraband cargo in some lonely creek, or bight. There is always a party on land as well as at sea, on such nights. Some sly farmer is generally in the secret, who engages to provide carts and horses for "the run," and, if need require, furnishes places of concealment for the goods, on condition of receiving a share of them in return for his services.

Daniel Bloxham, of the Shore-end Wood Farm, was supposed to have amassed a considerable property during the war, by his secret alliance with Harold Peterson, and Magnus Swaine, two of the most daring smugglers on the eastern coast of England. Nine centuries appeared to have had little or no effect in qualifying the fierce blood they had inherited from their Danish ancestors; they were a pair of determined red-rovers, and had, for many years, carried on their contraband trade in

defiance of French privateers and English revenue cutters by sea, and generally contrived to outwit the preventive lieutenant and his armed force, and all the wiles of the custom-house officers by land.

They were well-known characters for forty miles round, and had a numerous connexion of mysterious customers, whom they secretly supplied with genuine Schiedam and Cogniac, also with tea and tobacco of exquisite quality, at less than half the price at which inferior samples of the same could be procured in the regular way.

Harold Peterson and Magnus Swaine rode the finest hunters in the country. In their rough nautical costume, they might literally have been termed a pair of "horse marines." They always rode at headlong speed, and though they often scoured the country in different directions, at the same time, they had only one pair of spurs between them. This was productive of no inconvenience to either of these seafaring cavaliers; for, be it known to my readers, that a Suffolk smuggler wears but one spur, and this is the outward sign and token whereby the profession of contraband merchant is indicated. If a bold weather-beaten horseman, in a broad low-crowned glazed hat, blue jacket, and huge jack boots, garnished with one spur only, make his appearance on a market-day in any town near the coast of Norfolk or Suffolk, he is sure to be greeted with winks and signs, and inklings of orders for

"*moonshine*," from a variety of customers who ought to know better than to have any dealings with persons of his class.

Harold Peterson and Magnus Swaine had married sisters, and they had each one son, genuine scions of their piratical forefathers. Young Harold Peterson and young Magnus Swaine possessed decided talents and propensities for the paternal profession; but old Harold and old Magnus, having amassed a considerable share of property, determined to bring up their heirs for gentlemen. With this aspiring object in view, they sent the lads to a school where Greek and Latin might be acquired by those who had a taste for learning, and everything useful forgotten by those who had not. The arrangements of old Harold and old Magnus were greatly criticised by all the sea-faring population of Shore-end.

"What should old smugglers' sons want with chopping Latin?" cried Hacon, the pilot.

"They can make the Dutch skippers understand how many tubs of Hollands they want, without that," observed Fisk, the boat-builder.

"Humph!" ejaculated Christian, the rope-spinner, "but you know times are not what they were for smugglers; and old Peterson and old Swaine mean to leave off that trade and set up for gentlemen."

A general burst of laughter followed this observation, and many shrewd sarcasms were

uttered by the coterie at the expense of the parents of young Harold and young Magnus ; but all came to the conclusion that "old Peterson and old Swaine had been infected with the pride and ambition of their friend and colleague, Daniel Bloxham, who was bringing up his daughter Margaret for a fine lady, and called her '*Miss Bloxham.*'"

"I remember that Dan Bloxham, a poor boy, with scarce a shoe to his foot," said Snooks, the smith ; "and now he has bought Shore-end farm, and sent his girl to boarding-school, where they say she is learning to play on the music ! Well, smuggling is a fine trade."

"I never knew a smuggler die a rich man for all that," observed the boat-builder.

"Nor I," said the pilot ; "for let their gains be ever so great, they are contrary to the laws of the land ; and money that is ill gotten, you understand, never seems to do any good. You know the saying too, '*The pitcher never goes so often to the well, but it comes home broken at last.*'"

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG Harold and young Magnus, meantime, possessing good memories and quick wits, contrived to pick up the usual stock of Greek and

Latin to be acquired in provincial seminaries; they also learned a little bad French and awkward dancing; and having plenty of money to disburse among the ushers and boys, were accounted very good scholars and excellent fellows. During the holidays, they enjoyed the recreation of occasional trips to Rotterdam and Dunkirk, in the paternal lugger, and displayed such ready tact and activity in the business of landing and running of cargoes, that all the subordinates in the firm of Swaine, Peterson, Bloxham, and Co., averred "it was a crying sin to think of making gentlemen of such promising lads." These observations at length made such an impression on the mind of young Magnus Swaine, that he resolutely withstood all old Magnus's plans for his induction into genteel life, and avowed his intention of following no other calling than that of a smuggler.

Young Harold Peterson was a person of a more aspiring spirit; he allowed himself, at the age of sixteen, to be articled to Mr. Leech, the surgeon, of Scrapeton, which his father told him "was a long step towards becoming a gentleman, since 'the young doctors,' as Mr. Leech's assistants were styled, were invited to evening parties, and admitted to the monthly assemblies at Scrapeton Angel, where they might invite young ladies in book-muslin and white satin, to dance with them if they liked." The promise of these tempting

privileges induced Harold the younger to make a legal surrender of his time and freedom for the term of five years, and to become a junior spreader of plaisters, roller of pills, and pounder of drugs, in a small square brick-floored den, in Mr. Leech's domicile, which was dignified with the name of the surgery.

In due time this descendant of the sea kings was initiated into the mysteries of bleeding and drawing of teeth, and became familiar with the nomenclature of the pharmacopœia; but as for advancing one step towards the rank of a gentleman in virtue of his vocation, that was out of the question. His parentage and connexions were too well known, and he was regarded, by all the *elite* of the town, as a sort of Pariah, whom it would be loss of caste to admit to the slightest degree of intimacy. His father paid handsomely for his boarding in Mr. Leech's own family, and made frequent offerings of genuine Eau de Cologne and French gloves to the young ladies and their mamma, which procured him civil treatment in the house, if toleration may be called civility. He was even suffered to appear at their evening parties, and to enjoy the satisfaction of losing his money at the loo-table, round which the members of the petty aristocracy of Scrapeton congregated, on such occasions; but no one ever dreamed of including him in the invitations that were addressed to the surgeon's

family ; and, as to his being proposed as a subscriber to the monthly assemblies, it would have been an easier matter to have procured a voucher to a ticket of admission for him to Almacks.

Harold Peterson felt all these things far more bitterly than he would have done the severest hardships and privations. Then, too, his cousin, Magnus Swaine, the young smuggler, a reckless scapegrace, frequently visited the town, and bore so provoking a resemblance to himself, that he was not unfrequently taxed with the commission of his pranks. Harold imagined his exclusion from the society to which he aspired was, in a great measure, occasioned by his connection with Magnus ; and, under the influence of this idea, treated him with studied coldness and contempt, and not unfrequently gave him the cut-direct, when they met in the streets of Scrapeton. Magnus was not of a temperament to take such usage meekly, and the result was mutual hatred—deadly and irreconcilable. This feeling was greatly augmented when Harold Peterson, weary of the monotony and irksomeness of his life at Scrapeton, after serving an apprenticeship to physic and gentility nearly four years, broke from his bondage in consequence of some slight from the young people in his master's family, and returned to Shore-end in a high state of morbid irritability, having just tarried long enough at Scrapeton to become infected

with the pride, the folly, and affectation of fourth-rate exclusives in a provincial town. There were resources, if he had chosen to apply himself to them, in the pursuits of science and learning, far superior to the amusements of round games and quadrille parties, in which he had so eagerly desired to participate, and offering, withal, more honourable paths to the esteem of the world, than the paltry ones from which he was elbowed and barred by the petty provincial exclusives who regarded him as an unqualified intruder in their select circle.

Unfortunately, Harold Peterson did not possess the elevation of mind which might have taught him the difference between the vulgar pride of aspiring to their society, and the noble spirit of independence that should have led him to look on such matters with indifference, or to hold himself above them. His father, in his extreme ignorance of the constitution of society, had told him that wealth would purchase everything the world could bestow, and he had put his trust in a presumptuous maxim, instead of seeking to qualify himself for the mark at which his ambition pointed, and therefore his mortification was the more complete.

The exultation of his cousin Magnus aggravated the bitterness of his feelings, and the vulgarity and disreputable nature of his connections rendered his home more distasteful

to him than his residence at Scrapeton. Under these circumstances, his wisest plan would have been to have obtained his father's assistance to enable him to finish his medical education in some distant county, where his family might chance to be unknown ; but his father, being naturally exasperated at the manner in which he had rendered his project for advancing him to the coveted rank of a gentleman abortive, treated him with repulsive scorn in their domestic intercourse ; and when, at length, the paternal love and pride of old Harold Peterson led him to suggest this measure to his son, the young man had discovered an attraction in Shore-end sufficiently powerful to bind him to the hitherto detested spot.

Margaret Bloxham, the heiress of the Shore-end Wood Farm, had returned from boarding-school, having attained to womanly stature and appearance, and acquired a smattering of a variety of useless accomplishments, together with notions which, in her station of life, were calculated to render her anything but happy. Her return to Shore-end had preceded that of young Harold Peterson by some months—months which had been spent by her in the gloom and forced seclusion of a home little suited to her taste.

Margaret was possessed of considerable personal attractions ; she had been from childhood the object of young Magnus Swaine's ardent affec-

tion ; and that affection, when after an absence of three or four years she returned in the bloom of her seventeenth summer to Shore-end, blazed into passion. Margaret regarded the young smuggler as a fellow of no reckoning, and treated him accordingly ; yet, not without a certain dash of coquettish encouragement, resulting from the secret pleasure her vanity caused her to receive from his attentions, and also because she had no other lover. Magnus took frequent umbrage at her fine-lady airs, and the capriciousness of her conduct to himself ; but Margaret always exacted the most unconditional submissions from him, even when she was aware that the provocation had been on her side, and so often reminded him "that he was not a gentleman, and therefore no judge of a lady's conduct and manners," that Magnus, at length, implored his father to make a gentleman of him.

"I thought," said old Magnus, "it was your intention to live and die a smuggler, my boy."

"I have changed my mind since then," said the young man ; "neither would I wish to be a pestle-and-mortar gentleman, like that sneering puppy Harold Peterson, to be looked down upon by all the mushroom gentry in a country town, till I grew as big a fool as the upstarts by whom my company was scorned, and learned to despise my own flesh and blood. No ; I will be qualified at once by entering the army ; that is the way

daring fellows, from among the people, rose to be knights and nobles in the old time."

"Humph!" cried his father, "but there were no smugglers in those days, only a set of robbers and cut-throats, as I have heard; and, now-a-days, soldier officers are the proudest fellows on the face of the earth; and to tell you the truth, Magnus, I think you would do better in the marines, where people are not quite so stuck up as in the army."

"Anything, anything, that may entitle me to be called a gentleman," cried Magnus.

CHAPTER III.

DURING the war a commission in the marines was not a difficult thing to obtain, neither were the expenses of officers in that service such as to preclude persons of an inferior grade from joining them; so, before either Margaret Bloxham or the Petersons were aware of his intentions, young Magnus Swaine was converted into a junior officer of a corps of marines in a seventy-four, under sailing orders. Previously to this preferment, his cousin Harold had conceived the intention of rivalling Magnus in the good graces of Margaret Bloxham; and, during his absence, so far succeeded in his design that Margaret signified her resolution of

never marrying any one but him ; whereupon her father and old Harold Peterson entered into a compact, or family treaty, the articles of which were that the young people should marry, and young Harold assist in carrying on the farm with Daniel Bloxham, and become the active agent in that department of the smuggling concern which had hitherto devolved on him.

Magnus Swaine, the elder, protested against this arrangement, urging the prior claims of his son to the hand of Margaret Bloxham ; but she boldly asserted "her right to change her mind if it seemed her good ;" and her father said "his girl was free to please herself as to which of the cousins she wedded." There was no gainsaying this ; nevertheless, old Magnus was mal-content, and talked of withdrawing his share of the property from the firm, and abandoning the business of a smuggler. "Peace was proclaimed," he said, "and his son, Lieutenant Swaine, was coming home, and would take it very ill of him if he did not cut the connexion altogether, after such unhandsome usage as he had experienced from them all."

The importance of conciliating their offended coadjutor was deeply felt by the elder Peterson and Daniel Bloxham ; they proffered him an additional share in the profits of the run provided he would join them in the next venture, they having been offered an unu-

sually valuable cargo on the other side of the water, on advantageous terms. Magnus Swaine, however, positively refused to have either part or lot in the affair unless the engagement between young Harold and Margaret were broken off.

"Suppose we say it is, just to humour him," suggested Daniel Bloxham, who felt the danger of a split with a person so deep in all the secrets of the junta as Magnus Swaine. "We shall get exchequered if we do not," pursued he.

"No, no ; Magnus Swaine is not the fellow to turn informer," observed old Harold Peterson.

"Nevertheless, it will be better to put the wedding off for a few weeks, and tell him I have other views for Margaret," said Daniel Bloxham ; "we'll go talk to the young people about it."

His representation had the desired effect, and the lovers agreed to assume an appearance of estrangement — an appearance, however, that failed to deceive old Magnus, and he persisted in his refusal to have either part or lot in the projected venture from Holland.

"Mayhap you'll blow us up with the Preventives, out of spite, because Bloxham's girl prefers my boy to yours, Magnus," said old Peterson.

"If so be I had such a thought, it is not very likely I should own it," returned Magnus, drily.

"We shall venture it, howsomever," said

Peterson, "and if ill-luck befall us, we shall know whom to thank."

"If you bespeak ill-luck for yourselves, don't go to blame me if it chance to happen," returned Magnus.

"That fellow will turn traitor," observed Peterson to his son and Daniel Bloxham.

"I shall get exchequered then," said Daniel; "for he knows all the vaults and hiding places on the farm as well as I do. Something ought to be done to stop his tongue."

"You see, fair means have no effect on him," said Peterson; "yet I were loth to do anything *very particular*—you understand; for we have been true brothers and trusty friends these five-and-thirty years that we have roved the salt seas and scoured the land together.

'When a moonlight night
Was our delight,
In the season of the year.'

"What signifies that," rejoined Bloxham, "if he means to betray us all to the sharks? Three thousand tubs of Schiedam, five hundred of Cogniac, fifty bags of gunpowder tea, eighty of bohea, and twenty of shag tobacco, fifteen of pigtail, are in my big vault under the west sheep-walk. A pretty haul that would be for the revenue sharks."

"Oh, never fear the vault; we still owe him

a fifth on that stock, which can't be paid till we touch the gold," said Peterson.

"True," returned Bloxham; "but if anything happened to him in the meantime, that would all be profit, and our secret safe."

"No such thing," said young Harold; "his son knows the ins and outs of the concern as well as old Magnus, and he is expected home in a day or two, as I hear. Of course, as he wears the king's livery, he will be hand and glove with the Preventive lieutenant."

"Then," said Bloxham, "we have got into a pretty considerable scrape, as the Yankees say; and the only way to get out of it, will be to let young Magnus marry my girl."

"That is only shifting the match to another train," replied Harold, "for I will blow you up myself to the Preventives if you break faith with me about Margaret."

"Dare to utter another word of that kind, and I shoot you where you stand," cried his father, grasping one of the pistols he always carried in his breast pocket.

"I believe it will be the best job you can do for me," said Harold; "it has been the sorrow of my life that ever I had a father of your fashion."

"Only hear the ungrateful villain, Bloxham, when I was at such an expense in trying to make a gentleman of him, and he crossed all my

plans then, and now nothing must serve him but lagging here like a lubber, to be the fire-brand of our concern, by fixing his mind on his cousin's girl, and bringing us into a split with his uncle Magnus, to our utter ruin."

"No, no, that must not be," said Bloxham; "I see no reason why I should give my girl to Harold, any more than to old Swaine's boy."

"Only that Margaret loves me, and has sworn never to marry another."

"A parcel of boarding-school stuff, learned out of what d'ye call 'em Novelty books, what you bring her from Scrapeton, to help make a fool of her. I tell you, when Magnus comes home in his fine officer's dress, she will soon send you to the right-about, young man."

"Will she though?" ejaculated Harold.

"Yes will she; I know the girl a little better than you, and we shall see if it won't be so."

Daniel Bloxham proved himself a correct judge of his daughter's stability of character. The first appearance of young Magnus in his uniform as a marine officer, with the improved air and manners which three years spent in the society of military and naval gentlemen had given him, and above all his title of Lieutenant Swaine, decided her to conform to her father's wish, and become his wife. A general reconciliation then took place between old Magnus, his brother-in-law, and Daniel Bloxham; and it was agreed

that the marriage should be solemnized at the first convenient opportunity.

"But what is to be done with your son Harold in the meantime?" said Bloxham to old Peterson, "for in my humble opinion he is a perilous fellow to deal with."

"He shall go over to Holland with me to freight the lugger, and in the meantime you can amuse yourselves with the wedding at the Wood Farm; only be sure to let us have everything in readiness against our signal for the run," said Peterson.

Bloxham and Magnus Swaine shook hands with him upon it, and Harold was informed—not of Margaret's change of purpose, but of his father's intention of taking him, as the second in command, in the lugger.

Harold looked dark and sullen at the intimation, and said "his business was to help his father-in-law with the run, he thought."

"Your business is to obey my orders, young man," said his father, sternly, "and not to play the mutineer or the skulk."

"There is no law against me if I do," returned Harold; "and to tell you plainly, I have no liking to the expedition."

"Why not, you mutinous dog?" demanded his father, angrily.

"Because there is a king's officer in the secret,

and if he does his duty either way he is a traitor."

"If you mean my son," interposed old Magnus Swaine, "I'd have you know there is no traitor's stuff about him; and if you say there is, he'll make you eat your words."

"You are all in league against me, I see," said Harold; "and I'll not trust myself on the high seas, in company with such a gang of salt-water thieves."

"You will stay on shore and inform against us, will you?" cried his father, grasping him fiercely by the arm; "but know that we will have you with us, dead or alive," added he, lowering his voice, and speaking through his shut teeth; "and remember, if there be no law for smugglers, they have a law among themselves."

"Don't be a fool, Harold," said Bloxham; "you know your father is not a man to be trifled with."

"Neither am I," muttered Harold as the group separated in consequence of the approach of some of the town's people.

CHAPTER IV.

HAROLD strode across the fields, rushed through the wooded path that led to Bloxham's house; and, bursting into the little parlour which Margaret called her *boudoir*, he stood before her, pale

with agitation and anger. Margaret, who was arranging some flowers in a china vase, and neither expected nor desired his company, proceeded with her employment, with a provoking air of indifference.

"There was a time," said Harold, "when if I entered this room, I was considered worthy of a welcome, Margaret."

"Do you expect me to place a chair for you, too?" returned Margaret.

"Civility, to say nothing of affection, required you to invite me to sit down, at any rate."

"So you can, if you like; but now don't tease me to talk to you till I have finished arranging these flowers."

Harold snatched the flowers from her, dashed them on the ground, and fiercely trampled them under his feet.

Margaret, between terror at his violence, and anger at his rudeness, burst into tears, and sobbed out, "I never was treated so ill in my life, and I won't bear it, I can tell you; but it is a good thing you have shown your temper in time for me to escape the wretched fate of being wedded to such a ruffian."

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Harold, with a scornful laugh, "you want to pick a quarrel with me, Margaret, as an excuse for your own falsehood, vain, heartless flirt, that you are!"

"And you call me names too, you ill-mannered

fellow," cried Margaret; "but if your cousin Magnus were here, he would protect me."

"If I had found him here, one or other of us had been a dead man ere this," said Harold.

Margaret turned pale, and trembled at the terrible expression of his eye, as he uttered these words.

"Margaret," continued he, after a pause, "are not you my betrothed wife?"

She was silent.

"Answer me," he cried. "Did you not tell your own father, in my presence, that you would never marry any other man than me?"

"What then?"

"Are you not perjured and forsworn?"

"I was perjured and forsworn to my true love Magnus, when I suffered myself to be enticed by your flattering words."

"Can you deny that you endeavoured to attract my attention by all manner of coquettish wiles?"

"Dear me, Harold, how foolishly you talk. I never wanted any of your attentions; but you were always waylaying me in my walks, and walking home with me from church, till I was entangled into something like an engagement."

"Something *like* an engagement! Grant me patience! why we were all but man and wife three weeks ago; and then you were all love and tenderness for me, and ready to give up friends, fortune, and every earthly consideration, for my

sake. Margaret Bloxham, in the name of all you hold sacred, what has wrought this change in you ?”

“It is no use entering into a discussion on the subject, especially as I don’t want to hurt your feelings, Harold, by saying anything that might appear unkind.”

“Oh, you are vastly considerate, Miss Bloxham ; but the fact is, you have fallen in love with the glitter of an epaulette, and have made up your mind to jilt me.”

“Really, Harold, you have grown so unamiable and ferocious of late, that you positively terrify me. I would not have a husband of your temper for the world.”

“If you had been constant and kind, you would have found me all gentleness and love ; but you have driven me to despair, and then insult me in my misery. Listen to me, Margaret. You are the only thing on earth I ever loved. Can you expect me to resign you to a rival ?”

“Harold, it is of no use deceiving you ; I can never be your wife.”

“Margaret, that sentence from your lips, so coolly uttered, has severed the last link that bound me to the world and its bitter slavery,” cried Harold. “I thought there had been one green spot in the midst of a dreary howling wilderness for me ; and I put my trust in a quicksand, which has proved its treachery at a moment

when I least expected it ; but think not I will bear my wrongs tamely."

With these words he left the farm-house, and, returning home, threw himself upon the bed in a storm of passion, which at length subsiding into a sort of quiescent gloom, he remained buried in sullen meditation till half an hour past midnight, when, in obedience to his father's commands, he rose, put on his seafaring dress, and, armed almost to the teeth, proceeded with him to the lonely marsh creek, where the lugger was moored under the guard of old Magnus and a crew of daring outlaws, with whom he embarked for the coast of Holland.

CHAPTER V.

THE third morning after the lugger had sailed, the good people of Shore-end were enlivened by the unexpected event of the nuptials of pretty Margaret Bloxham and the newly returned Lieutenant Swaine, the intensions of the parties having been kept a profound secret till within a few hours of its solemnization. Great curiosity and wonder were excited and expressed on the occasion, and a vastly impertinent crowd of busy-bodies assembled in the churchyard to see the bridal party descend from the postchaise in which they proceeded to church. Far less amazement, however, was

excited by the French white brocade dress, Lyons shawl, Leghorn bonnet, and real Brussels lace veil worn by the bride, than at the fact of her having come to plight her nuptial troth to her old lover, Magnus, instead of his cousin, with whom she had (to the great indignation and scandal of all the town) kept company as his betrothed wife, during the absence of the said Magnus. The men wondered how Magnus could ever overlook such an affront; and the women said, "that now-a-days, jilts were always more prized than girls who loved truly; but those who changed so often before-hand, were not much to be relied on after marriage; for their parts, they were surprised how such inconstant creatures ever got husbands at all."

The Preventive lieutenant stationed at Shore-end was the person most astonished at these nuptials, for he could not imagine how an officer wearing the king's livery could form such a connexion, only that persons brought up as young Swaine had been seldom entertained a particularly nice sense of honour; and, considering his parentage, Lieutenant Swaine could scarcely add a blot to the family escutcheon by his matrimonial alliance.

As for Magnus, he was too passionate a lover to stand on refinements. Margaret Bloxham, with all her faults, had been the adored of his heart from childhood; and he was full of exultation,

besides, at having triumphed over his detested kinsman by securing the fair and fickle prize for which they had contended with a rivalry fiercer than that of tigers.

The bells rang out their jocund peals as merrily, and the colours on the flag-staffs along the cliffs fluttered as gaily, at this marriage as at any other that had been celebrated at Shore-end, within the last twenty years; for the bridegroom was liberal of his largesses to the proper people, and the beauty of the bride, and the grandeur of "*po-shaying* it to church," gave a considerable éclat to the affair.

The wedding was kept with great festivity and jollity at Wood Farm. The bride played on the piano and sang as often as she was requested, to the great admiration of the bridegroom, her father, and his men, who held a deep carouse on the occasion; but, in the midst of their glee, the well-known signal of the absent smuggler-crew was fired, off the wooded promontory, about a mile below the house, which afforded so favourable a shelter for the landing of the cargo from the loaded lugger.

"Halloo!" cried the bridegroom, starting up and forgetting the character of a king's officer, in the hereditary propensities of a smuggler's son; "there they are, my lads, and before we expected them."

"I—I don't quite understand it," stammered

Bloxham, whose head was in no slight degree affected by the mighty potations he had swallowed, and yet had a prevailing idea that the wind was not exactly favourable enough for such a hasty voyage.

A second gun boomed low and knell-like over the deep. The men all started up from their debauch, and looked at Bloxham for orders. "Father," said the bride, who was the only self-possessed person present, "are the horses harnessed, and the carts ready to be put to?"

"I don't think they are, Madge. Magnus, my fine fellow, you used to be a prime one at a run. Do you take the ordering of the men and cattle, for you see I am not quite up to the thing to-night."

"Impossible! I am in the king's service now, and should lose my commission, with disgrace, if I had anything to do with it."

"And so you will stand with your hands in your pockets to see the cargo lost, and your own father ruined. Why, it will never be known if you do give us a helping hand at our need, boy."

The lieutenant looked irresolute.

"Speak to him, Madge," continued Bloxham, "he won't refuse to do anything you ask on your wedding day."

"Oh, yes," cried Margaret looking up in her newly-wedded husband's eyes, with more than her wonted insinuation of manner, "you will

do anything to oblige me, I know; besides, all our fortunes are at stake, you are aware. It is but helping father this once, and who is to know anything about it, if you change your fine uniform for your rough pea-jacket and trowsers, and south-wester hat? Now do go and help father with the run this time, just for my sake, or I shall say you don't love me, deary." She put her pretty face on his shoulder and affected to weep.

Even Jenny the maid, who was the daughter of one of the lugger's crew, and as much excited as any of the party, added her persuasions, and whispered, "Lawk, sir, if your cousin Harold had been here, he would have done anything to please missus, I know."

"Ah, Jenny, *he* never said me nay, you know," sobbed Margaret, who had always tears at command.

Thus urged, Magnus gathered the land-force together, and in quick time the swift roadsters in the stables were harnessed to a dozen light, yet strongly-built, high-railed carts, half filled with straw, and presently rattled out of the farm-yard.

"I cannot say I like the job," said Magnus to his father-in-law, who partly sobered by the strong necessity he felt of being sober at this crisis, had mounted his horse to accompany the party to the creek, where the lugger was expected to land.

They gained the spot, but the lugger was not there. The night was dark and foggy, and it was in vain that Magnus and the most experienced of the party listened for a signal; not even the laving of an oar was to be heard in the deep dead calm that suddenly appeared to have lulled the wave-lets on the shore into a breathless repose.

"I don't understand it," muttered Bloxham; "we all seem like people walking in their sleep; howsomever, I'll let the lads know our latitude, at any rate;" and with these words he threw up a blue light. It gleamed far and wide for an instant, over the misty main; but the only object it revealed was one of their own bluish-white, sharp-keeled boats, cutting its way, like an arrow, through the waves, and pushing out to sea.

"Yonder is our Dolphin," cried one of the men to Bloxham; "but who has got hold of her?"

"And where has the lugger vanished?" responded Bloxham.

"Who has seen the lugger at all, to-night?" asked Magnus.

"Nay, we all heard her signals," replied the men.

"Aye, aye, but I begin to suspect and fear we have all been made fools of to-night — my wedding night too," said Magnus. "And who has been left to take care of my bride?"

"Why, who should there be but Jenny, the servant-maid?" replied Bloxham.

“Nay, then,” rejoined Magnus, “I will return and take care of her myself, and the run may go to Jericho, for me.” He retraced his steps with all the haste that love, and anxious thoughts of the object of that love, could inspire.

Bloxham, with the horses, men, and carts, remained on the beach in momentary expectation of the boats from the lugger bringing the cargo to shore, since the lugger herself “seemed to be playing at hide and seek,” said he, “in some of the coves or projecting angles of the coast.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE clock in the old gothic tower of Shore-end church struck one thrilling unrepeatd stroke, announcing the first hour of morning, as the bridegroom drew near to the lonely farm-house where he had left his newly-wedded Margaret, in all the blooming flush of youth, and health, and joy. The fog was beginning to disperse, in a cold drizzly shower, and the moon, then in her last quarter, and waning to a crescent, threw a sickly gleam over the hazy ocean and wooded headland; but neither lugger nor boat was in sight, save a distant shooting speck, which none but a smuggler, or Preventive officer's quick and experienced eye, would have detected on the surface of the waves.

Magnus clearly recognized it as the Dolphin, the lugger's swiftest sailing boat, and naturally supposed that she had been dispatched on a look-out mission to the coast, as the *avant courier* of the lugger. "I am afraid we are all making a blundering hand of this, our people's last trip," thought he, and instinctively whistling a few bars of "Will Watch," that melancholy smuggler's ditty, he turned to enter the house. It looked dark and desolate. No cheering candles within shed their inviting rays through the broad antique casement of the room that had so lately echoed with mirth and festive glee, and he was startled at perceiving the door open. He rushed in, exclaiming, "Margaret, Margaret! wife, love, where are you? Ho! Margaret, speak!" but there was no answer.

The candles were all extinguished; but, by the dim light of the smouldering embers on the hearth, Magnus perceived something lying across the threshold of the inner room—it was the lifeless form of the unfortunate servant girl, who had been left alone with his bride in the house. Magnus ignited one of the candles by thrusting it into the fire, and, in a climax of agony and terror, proceeded to search the fatal dwelling; but of Margaret, his beloved, no trace or vestige was to be found. As soon as he had ascertained this fact, he rushed abroad, and with all the energy of his nature shouted, nay, shrieked her

name through the dark fir copse, and along the broken cliffs; but the hollow echoes that in mocking syllables repeated his frantic summons back to his ear, were the only replies. He paused, exhausted with his own violence, and listened—oh, how intensely—till he could hear the distant trampling of the horses with Bloxham's party on the beach, and the stifled talking of the men. "Halloo!" he cried, "Bloxham, father—help—murder—here! here! here!"

"Aye, aye!" shouted the men, in reply, and an immediate rush and clattering of wheels and horses' hoofs on the shingle announced the approach of his party, and not to him alone, for the coast-guard were also on the alert.

They had been roused by the signals which had deceived the smugglers, and came down in force upon them, armed and prepared for battle if resistance had been offered. At another time, a bloody skirmish might have ensued; but now the moon-shiners had no cargo to defend, and their leaders were panic-stricken, and bewildered with horror and alarm.

To Magnus, the implication of his honour, as an officer in the king's service, the peril of a court-martial, and loss of commission, were as nothing in that hour—he only thought of the mysterious loss of his bride; and, instead of offering resistance to the Preventive force, when, with weapons in his hands, he was called on to surrender, he

demanded a parley with their chief, and wildly implored his assistance in searching for Margaret.

At first, the lieutenant, being well accustomed to the wiles employed by the smugglers of the Suffolk coast, listened doubtfully to the bereaved bridegroom; but at length the strong agony of Magnus's supplications, and the doleful howls of Bloxham, wrought upon him to proceed with them to the farmhouse, where the body of the murdered servant afforded a fearful confirmation of the tale of woe and horror. Yet there were no wounds or marks of violence on the person of the deceased, and her death appeared to have been the result of striking her temple against the sharp angle of a projecting moulding of the door-post, in her fall. There were silver cups and spoons on the table, with other tempting articles of value; but nothing was removed. It was plain, therefore, that the abduction of the bride was not the deed of common robbers.

"Young Harold Peterson is the villain," cried Bloxham, striking his hand on the table passionately.

"Aye, and he has carried her off in the Dolphin, master," said one of the smugglers. "A pretty go, that."

"It was he who fired the signals off the Wood-End-ness, to lure us all to the cove yonder, there," exclaimed Bloxham. "I see it all now; yet how could it be, Magnus, when

he went off in the lugger to Holland with his father and yours?"

Magnus only answered with a groan; he had sunk on a seat in a perfect stupor of consternation and despair, and the cold drops of perspiration were falling from his brow like rain.

"Rouse yourself, man," cried the Preventive lieutenant, "you will find your bride in the lugger. Your own father commands her, does he not?"

"He did," said Magnus, speaking with difficulty; "but there was old Harold Peterson, too, and Heaven above only knows who may command her now, or what devilry has been done on the high seas."

"You smugglers are a queer set," said the lieutenant, "and there seems to have been pretty doings at your wedding, *Lieutenant Swaine*."

"There have indeed," groaned Magnus.

"I am sorry to be under the necessity, too, of taking you all into custody," continued the Preventive officer.

"You have not found anything of a contraband description in our carts, nor yet on my premises, lieutenant," said Daniel Bloxham.

"Why no, not at present, Mr. Bloxham; but a murder has been committed in your house, under very mysterious circumstances, which the

legal authorities in the town will be inquiring into, in the morning."

"Why you don't think I have had anything to do with that, when I have lost my own only child through the same parties by whom the murder has been committed?" cried the farmer, wringing his hands.

With the first light of the morning, the coast-guard commenced an active search on the premises of Daniel Bloxham, and found, not the lost bride, but his well-stored vaults of contraband property, of which seizure was made, of course.

The following night, the Preventive lieutenant and his crew manned their boat, and encountered the smuggler's heavily loaded lugger off the wooded promontory, where the false signals had been made, which caused the fatal termination of young Magnus Swaine's nuptial festivities. A bloody engagement took place within hearing, almost within sight, of Shore-end, and not till the daring partners, old Harold Peterson, and his brother-in-law, Magnus Swaine, fell, covered with wounds, did the desperate crew surrender their barque.

Neither the abducted bride, nor her discarded lover were in the captured lugger; but some degree of elucidation was thrown on the mysterious circumstances connected with her disappearance, by the information given by the

crew, as to the proceedings of young Harold Peterson, who, on the night of their arrival off the coast of Holland, had deserted, in company with two of their companions, in their swift sailing-boat, the Dolphin, to the infinite indignation of his father and old Magnus Swaine.

A succession of rough gales set in immediately after these events, the Dolphin was discovered at sea, floating keel uppermost, by one of the vessels belonging to Shore-end, and towed into port. This was the only clue ever afforded as to the fate of the unfortunate bride, young Harold, and his accomplices.

The strong frame of the younger Magnus Swaine sank beneath the pressure of mental anguish, and brain fever terminated his life and sorrow within a few hours after he learned the dismal tidings. Daniel Bloxham, the sole survivor of the *dramatis personæ* of this awful tragedy, is a ruined man, partially bereft of reason. The uncertainty in which the fate of his daughter is involved has inspired him with the deceptive idea that she still lives, and will return, one day, the wife of Harold Peterson; while under the influence of this vain hope, he wanders, day and night, along the coast, to look out for her; but there are times when he feels the reality of his bereavement, beats his breast, and, with heart-rending cries, calls upon the sea to "give up its dead."

II.

WHITE-THORN FARM.

CHAPTER I.

LUCY MARLOW was the eldest daughter of the wheelwright, whose neat workshops and well-stocked yard occupied an open space at the entrance of the village of Woodfield. There were seven in the family besides Lucy; but Isaac Marlow was a thriving mechanic, and his children constituted a part of his wealth, for his five sons assisted him in the various branches of his craft, which comprehended not only the construction of wheels, but every description of agricultural carriage, from a wheelbarrow up to a waggon. Isaac Marlow had lost his wife, but her place in the household department was well supplied by the active exertions of his daughter Lucy, who conducted the whole of the domestic affairs, assisted by a stout girl of fourteen, who had been apprenticed to her father from the workhouse.

Polly Jones was an awkward uncivilized creature when she first arrived, for children reared

in workhouses were not formerly instructed either in useful knowledge or decent behaviour, for which cause they were often harshly treated by the persons to whom they were allotted. Such children were indeed deeply to be pitied, generally speaking; but little Polly fell into kind hands; and though, at first, she was very stupid and broke many things, from not having been accustomed to handle glass and crockeryware, Lucy, by the exercise of a little patience and forbearance, and some judicious encouragement, succeeded, in the course of a few months, in converting her young dependant into a valuable co-operator in her household labours, and in consequence gained time to educate her two little sisters. She also bestowed instruction in reading, writing and sewing on Polly, of an evening, when she had finished her allotted tasks, and the morning business went on all the better for this indulgence. Polly soon became a brisk, handy, intelligent girl, and all the neighbours congratulated Lucy on her good luck in meeting with such a treasure, not considering the pains Lucy had taken to render her such.

Lucy was of a serene, cheerful temper, the inward sunshine emanating from a mind at peace with itself, and the constant practice of virtuous, though often laborious, duties, gave brightness to her eyes, lightness to her step, and a sweetness of expression to her countenance,

far more attractive than beauty. Lucy was, however, very prepossessing both in her manners and person, and her dress was always so exquisitely neat, that she was universally admired when seen, which was but seldom, beyond the precincts of the productive little garden that had been created, partly by her own exertions, on a slip of waste land between the dwelling-house and her father's yard. Seldom did any young farmer in want of a wife ride past on his way to Scrapeton corn-market, without pausing and thrusting his horse's head and neck, and of course his own, over Isaac Marlow's gate, as if to contemplate the merits of the carts, rollers, and gaily painted waggons, that were drawn forth in that yard to tempt the agricultural purchaser; but, truth to tell, more glances were directed towards the rows of cabbages, lettuces, or it might be the tall lilies and flaunting sun-flowers, that flourished in the trim garden in the background, where Lucy Marlow sometimes might be seen engaged in her horticultural pursuits, assisted by her little sisters Jane and Annie. But, notwithstanding these errant glances, Lucy had attained her twenty-third year without any other token of the power of her charms, and it was the opinion of her five great brothers that Lucy would be an old maid; moreover, one of them had the incivility to tell her so.

"I hope it will be for the benefit of my family

if I am," was Lucy's meek reply ; " but, in truth, Hodge, I hardly know what my father and the little ones would do without me if I were to marry, of which, as you say, there is at present little chance," she added.

The fact was, Lucy had never given the slightest encouragement to those who were willing to attract her regard, because her heart had been secretly won by the silent but unmistakeable attentions of a young man, who she feared would not be permitted by his friends to consult his affections in the choice of a wife ; for Charles Rushmere was the eldest son of a man of sordid habits, who had amassed a considerable property by farming, and considered the increase of riches as the only duty in life.

Old Mr. Rushmere lived in a distant parish, but had purchased a fine farm at Woodfield for Charles to employ himself in cultivating for their mutual profit. Charles Rushmere was a young man of excellent morals, benevolent, handsome, spirited, and industrious, farmed in what was considered a good style, rode well, and was the agricultural Adonis of the village. All the damsels in his degree were disposed to set their caps at him, and their mothers said, " Poor Mr. Charles Rushmere must lead a very dull life at White-thorn farm without any one to take care of him except old Sukey Scratchet, his housekeeper, and it would be quite a charity to ask him to tea

in a friendly way now and then." So poor Mr. Charles Rushmere was charitably invited to tea-drinkings in the parish, too numerous to record, and all the "young ladies," as per courtesy the daughters of the farmers and shopkeepers of Woodfield were called, did their best, in turn, to make impressions on the heart of the handsome heir of the rich old miser of Scrapeton Grange.

Between Michaelmas and Christmas, Charles Rushmere had heard all the jingling pianofortes, and assisted in turning over all the blue, pink, and orange-coloured leaves of all the rival scrap-books in Woodfield, stared at all the monstrous Cupids, awkward graces, lap-sided butterflies, gaudy groups of oriental tinted flowers, Chinese landscapes, and bad, colored prints they contained; he had also, with astonishing want of tact, yielded obedience to sundry hypocritical entreaties not to read various halting rhymes to the honour and glory of the respective owners of these show-off volumes.

When Christmas came, Mr. Charles Rushmere was invited to a series of dances both public and private, at which he enjoyed the felicity of exhibiting his locomotive powers with every damsel in Woodfield, successively, except the only one whom he considered worth a second thought, the meek and modest Lucy Marlow. But Lucy never went to dances or gay tea-drinkings; her time was so fully occupied with the duties of her

father's household, and the instruction of her young sisters, that she never had a moment to spare for other recreation than the cultivation of the garden, and sometimes a quiet walk in the meadows with her father, sisters, and her little maid, on Sunday evenings after church.

Charles Rushmere sat in the next pew to that which was occupied by the honest wheelwright and his family, and soon got into a similar habit of rambling in the meadows after they came out of church, "to help him to digest the sermon, and get an appetite for his tea," as he facetiously observed to Isaac Marlow, as if to account for this practice. The wheelwright, who had his eldest daughter, the pride and delight of his heart on his arm, and had observed that their new neighbour's eyes had been oftener turned on her sweet face, than on his Prayer-book during the service, for many Sundays, had his own ideas on the motives of Charles Rushmere in joining them in their family walk; but the young man was so respectful and engaging in his manners, and confined his discourse so entirely to himself or the little girls during these rambles, that Isaac Marlow had no pretence for offering an objection to his company on such occasions. One evening, when they reached Marlow's gate, Charles Rushmere said, "I should consider it a great privilege if I were permitted to make one at your tea-table to-night, Miss Lucy."

Lucy looked down and replied, "that it was one of the rules of their family not to admit of Sunday visitors, because the evening of that day was devoted to the religious instruction of the children and the maid."

"Perhaps," observed Charles, with some degree of pique, "I should be equally unwelcome on any other evening?"

Lucy blushed and said, "that must depend on what her father thought."

"My good sir," said the wheelwright, "we are only members of what may be considered the working class, and you are the son of a rich man, one who is said to make some claim to the rank of a squire, and would probably consider us very much beneath you; therefore we must decline your company as a visitor at our humble board."

After this conversation, Charles Rushmere ceased to join the wheelwright and his family in their Sunday walks. He even went out of church by another door, and for three months looked at his book all prayer time, and at the parson during the sermon, instead of bestowing his devotions on his fair neighbour. Lucy began to think it would have been well if he had never done otherwise, for she considered that Charles Rushmere ought to have respected both her father and herself the more for the motives which led them to decline his overtures; and so Charles

really did, but, like many other lovers, he had anything but an agreeable way of receiving a necessary repulse. Then he got angry and jealous on the score of the bachelor agriculturists whom he saw bestowing so much more attention on Isaac Marlow's carts and waggons than he considered at all requisite.

CHAPTER II.

NOTWITHSTANDING the estrangement that had taken place between Charles Rushmere and the wheelwright's family, the young farmer was thinking of nothing else but Lucy, and daily taxing his ingenuity to devise some plausible excuse for obtaining admittance within the dwelling where she was the presiding genius. At length a bright idea struck him. "I will order a new tumbril of Isaac Marlow!" cried he, snapping his fingers, as he sat one dull evening moping over his solitary bachelor tea, thinking how pleasant it would be to see Lucy Marlow pouring it out for him.

Sukey Scratchet, his housekeeper, who had just finished smoking and burning a round of toast he had ordered half an hour before, but which, as it was washing day, she regarded as a particularly inconvenient requisition, looked

at him with a glance of curiosity and displeasure.

"A tumbril!" cried she; "why lauk, sir, what do you want with another tumbril, when you have two already?"

"I wish you would mind your own business, Mrs. Scratchet," retorted Charles with unwonted asperity, though, like all bachelors, he was very much under the domination of his housekeeper.

"I was minding my own business, I think," fiercely returned Sukey, "ironing your shirts, only you chose to ring the bell, which was very *ill-convenient* for me to answer, just as I had got the hot heater into the box-iron, and then I had to leave it to get cold, while I was making tea and toast for you. You didn't ought to have done that, sir, on a washing-day."

"But I wanted my tea, Sukey," said Charles meekly.

"Sure you might have made out, for once, with a mug of *bear*, and a lump of bread and cheese, in the pantry," muttered the irate housekeeper; "but young men have no thought for poor *servants* on washing days. Tea and toast indeed!"

Charles stood rebuked, but ventured to shew his displeasure by leaving the tea and toast, which he had violated the etiquette of a washing-

day, by ordering, untasted; whistled, "Pray Goody please to moderate the rancour of your tongue," as he left his little parlour; and with a fresh specimen of Sukey Scratchet's powers of maundering vexing his ears, walked forth "to look at his stock," and think of Lucy Marlow, with a strengthened determination to order one of those two-wheeled agricultural carriages yecept in East-Anglian parlance a *tumbrel*, of her father, as an excuse for improving his acquaintance with her.

Charles Rushmere chose a Saturday evening, after he had paid his people, as the time for this important transaction, partly in the hope that he might find Lucy alone, and partly with a half malicious intention of catching the young housekeeper in that state of confusion, with regard to the domestic arrangements, which in Suffolk is expressively called a *muddle*. But Lucretia herself, when her excellent housewifery was put to the test by the unexpected visit of her lord and his royal companions, appeared not to greater advantage spinning and carding among her maidens, than did the wheelwright's fair daughter sitting tranquilly by the bright fire and clean hearth of the freshly swept and garnished stone kitchen, in her neat brown merino dress and plain white collar, superintending and assisting in darning the hose of the males of the family with her sisters.

Any of the "young ladies" of Woodfield would have been ready to faint at the idea of being surprised at such vulgar employment. Lucy certainly blushed, and allowed her ball of blue mottled yarn to roll from her lap to the other end of the kitchen, but her confusion proceeded from pleasure at the sight of the unexpected visitor, not shame at having been discovered in the performance of one of her duties. Charles instantly rescued the ball from the impertinent playfulness of a saucy pet kitten that had just pounced upon it. He presented it to Lucy with the air of a Paladin.

"You find us very busy," said Lucy, as with downcast glance she received this little act of attention; "but we always finish the week with our odd jobs."

"Lucy," said little Jane, "I do think Hodge always makes such a great hole in the toe of his stocking on purpose. I never can mend this."

"Then give it to me, dear, and run the thin place in the foot of Robert's sock. That is easy work for you," returned Lucy.

Charles cast an observing glance on Lucy's proceedings, and thought how differently Sukey Scratchet would have conducted herself, if he had presumed to wear holes in his stockings of such provoking magnitude for her Saturday evening's amusement.

"Hallo, Lucy! are you giving the young squire a lesson in darning stockings?" cried Isaac Marlow in surprise as he entered, on perceiving Charles Rushmere's curly head peeping over his daughter's shoulder, his lips pursed up, and his round blue eyes intently fixed on the process of crossing the villanous hole in the toe of Hodge's Sunday hose.

It was now Charles's turn to blush, and he did blush, scarlet red, as he stammered out, in a genuine Suffolk whine, "Mr. Marlow, sir, I hope you will excuse me, but I have come to talk to you about a new tumbril."

"Certainly," said Isaac Marlow, rubbing his hands, "that is a very excusable offence; but why did you not come to the workshop at once, where you were sure of finding me?"

It did not suit the young man to explain his reasons; so he said, "he could go and look in the workshop then, if it suited Mr. Marlow."

"No," said Marlow, "we have shut up for the night, and to-morrow is Sunday; but I shall be very happy to receive your order, Master Charles, or mayhap I have a tumbril in the yard that may suit you."

"I will come and talk further on the subject on Monday," said Charles, casting a glance of intelligence at Lucy.

"Then be pleased to come to me in the workshop or yard, if you do," returned the cautious

father, who had detected the telegraphing between the lovers.

Lucy looked down, the corners of her rosy lips dimpling the while with the smile she vainly struggled to suppress.

"It is not every farmer who enters this house who is willing to order a new tumbril of you, Mr. Marlow," rejoined the young man.

"Mine honoured customer, there is a time for all things, and a place too in my business for receiving orders, and that is the workshop, where I shall be very proud of waiting on you."

CHAPTER III.

CHARLES was inwardly malcontent at Isaac Marlow's independent way of doing business with him, and half disposed not to give his order at all, especially as he was in no particular need of a new tumbril, and he knew his father would consider such a purchase a great piece of extravagance. However, he recollected that it would afford him a very plausible pretext for loitering in the precincts of Lucy's dwelling, if he were not permitted to enter it. So, on the Monday morning, the order was given, and once a-week, at least, he put on his smart velveteen shooting-frock and bright-coloured leathers, and walked into the wheelwright's yard, with

the free and easy air of a person who had now a right to come there, and inquired "how they were getting on with his new tumbril?" Marlow's sons thought this an exceedingly good joke; but the wheelwright shook his head, and replied at last, "Not the better for your coming so often to trouble us about it, Master Charles, and we are making all the haste we can to get it off the premises."

Charles considered this observation very uncivil, and in return caused as many artificial delays as he could, by commanding a variety of alterations, and changing his mind twice or thrice as to the colour he willed it to be painted, and all for the sake of standing opposite Lucy's window while he discussed these points, which were considered by Isaac Marlow as very blameable innovations in the orthodox plan of building tumbrils. All the farmers who were accustomed to look over Marlow's gate thought so too, and the fancies, which the East Anglian agriculturists of half a century ago contemptuously termed "*cisums*, of young Charles Rushmere" about his new tumbril, became at length the talk of the three adjoining parishes. In due course the report reached the ears of Mr. Rushmere, senior; and one bright morning, when Charles, regardless of Isaac Marlow's repeated intimations that his tumbril had long been finished and ought to be removed, entered the yard with the intention of suggesting

another alteration, he found his father standing before the said tumbril, and surveying it with a sarcastic countenance.

"I have done myself the honour of coming from Scrapeton Grange this morning," said he, "to look at this precious article, which has afforded a theme for so many flattering remarks on the wisdom of my eldest son."

"I hope, sir, that it meets with your approbation," returned Charles, endeavouring to assume an air of nonchalance.

"No, sir, you don't hope any such thing ; for you know me too well to suppose I can approve of such needless folly and extravagance," retorted the old man with an ireful glance ; "and pray," continued he, "how do you think it is ever to be paid for ?"

"I shall pay for it out of my share of the profits of White-thorn farm."

"Oh, you will, sir ! Then let me tell you that if you turn my liberality to so poor an account, you shall have no farm to gain any profits from another year ; your brother Frank shall come to White-thorn farm, and you shall return home to take the labouring oar at Scrapeton Grange under my own eye."

"As you please sir," said Charles.

"No, sir ; it is not as I please ; for Sukey Scratchet, whom I sent here to take care of you and your house, tells me, 'that you are tired of

her, and want to bring home a wife to White-thorn farm.'"

"She only tells you the truth, sir," rejoined the young man. "I have bestowed my affections on the prettiest, the most sensible, and the most industrious girl in the parish, and if you are the good father I have ever had reason to consider you, you will not oppose my wish to make Lucy Marlow my wife."

"Very fine talking, but I have not laboured all my life to gain wealth that you might throw yourself away on a beggarly wheelwright's girl," replied the elder Rushmere, and, taking Charles by the arm, he led him out of Marlow's yard. Charles could have wept with shame and mortification at the thought of such a scene taking place there—within hearing of Lucy's brothers, too. Fortunately Isaac Marlow was absent that day purchasing timber, or the taunts of the sordid rich man would not have passed unanswered. There was a cloud on his brow when he sat down to supper that night, for his sons had related the particulars of this annoying affair to him, as they had before done to Lucy. Lucy's eyes were swollen with weeping. Her pride and delicacy had been deeply wounded, and she feared she had incurred her father's displeasure; but she had no cause for apprehension. Isaac Marlow was a just man, and a kind parent, and when she came to kiss him before they parted for the night, he

patted her cheek affectionately, and said, "Cheer up, my Lucy; you have been a good girl and a prudent one. No one has been to blame but Charles Rushmere, in playing such boy's tricks about that foolish tumbril, and perhaps I was worse than he for taking his order. However, the tumbril is a good one, and I shall dispose of it to another person, so that need not trouble old Rushmere."

The next day Isaac Marlow wrote word to Charles Rushmere, "that, as he understood his father disapproved of the order he had given him, he had sold the article to a fancy-farmer from London, and hoped he would have no further uneasiness about it."

"I hope he may dispose of his girl to the fancy-farmer from London as well as the tumbril," was the elder Rushmere's obliging comment on honest Marlow's communication. Charles turned pale with vexation and dismay; for the fancy-farmer, who was the son of a rich London mercer, and had recently turned an ancient farmhouse into a modern Gothic cottage, with a Grecian portico, ornamented in the Egyptian style, had created a far greater sensation among the rural nymphs of Woodfield than even Charles had done, and he feared might prove a formidable rival in the heart of Lucy, during his absence from the scene.

The elder Mr. Rushmere insisted on his giving

up White-thorn farm, for the present, to his brother, and returning to the Grange. Mr. Rushmere had cause to repent of this arrangement, for his son Frank, instead of bringing him either rents or profits from the farm, pursued a headlong career of dissipation as soon as he found himself in some degree his own master, formed an intimacy with the fancy-farmer from London, ordered his clothes of a Bond Street tailor of his recommending, set his father and Sukey Scratchet at defiance, smoked cigars, gave convivial parties at his bachelor abode, and at the end of a couple of years, deeply involved himself in debt, and finished his career by breaking his neck at a steeple-chase, which, as Sukey Scratchet consolingly observed to his father when she communicated the tragic event to him, "was the most *sensiblest* thing he had done since he came to live at White-thorn farm, and very convenient for his family, just at that time, for if he had only lived another week, he was going to marry the sister of the fancy-farmer's housekeeper, a very unworthy character as she understood; and then," pursued she, "all the money, you have been *scrabbing* (Suffolk for scraping) together, would have gone, you may guess where; for poor Master Charles ain't likely to want it long, as I guesses by the look of him; and so, as I say, it's all as it should be, and you will have plenty of time to look about you for an heir after poor

Master Charles is dead and his *fineral* is over."

"Does the woman mean to drive me mad by telling me of the death of one of my boys and anticipating the funeral of the other in the same breath?" exclaimed the miserable rich man of Scrapeton Grange.

"Why, lauk, sir, don't put yourself out with me, pray, for I'm sure I meant no offence by just giving you a hint, now we are talking of the death of Master Frank, that you ought not to set your mind too much on his brother; for if you haven't noticed his horrid bad looks and his tisicking cough, all the three parishes have, and they all lay the blame on your shoulders, 'cause they say 'he is breaking his heart for the love of Lucy Marlow, and the loss of White-thorn farm together,' and you would have been a happier, and, more than that, a richer man, if you had let him have them both, say I."

"Why, you vile old pic-thank, whose fault was it that I ever heard a parcel of tales about my son Charles?"

"Your own, to be sure, sir, for lending an ear to a set of *envyous sarpenes*, who came to set you against your own flesh and blood."

"Were not you at the very head of ear-wigging me, you deceitful old hag?"

"What, I, sir!—well, it is a fine thing to have some one to lay your evil deeds on. As

true as I'm alive, I always said Master Charles was my favorite, and well he might be, for a nicer, quieter young fellow in a house, I never waited upon. Always home and in bed by ten o'clock; always up by five in the morning, and seeing after his men, and worked harder than any of them. We had no harum-scarum doings with him. He had set his mind on a proper good girl, and that was what kept him so steady, for he bore in mind king Solomon's proverb, 'A virtuous woman is a crown of glory to her husband's head.'"

The awful termination of Frank Rushmere's reckless career caused much excitement in the parish of Woodfield, but a more general sensation of sorrow was created by the pale and melancholy appearance of Charles Rushmere at his brother's funeral.

Lucy's brothers told her he was certainly in a deep decline, and Lucy, instead of sleeping, bathed her pillow in tears that night. The next day was a beautiful May morning; the sun shone brightly, the bees were humming gaily among the newly-opened flowers in Lucy's little garden, the birds carolled forth their songs of joy in the white-blossomed cherry-trees and the old elms, that overshadowed the dwelling; her young sisters were playing with their pet-lamb on the grass plot, and the kitten frisking round them. Everything

seemed cheerful and happy, except poor Lucy.

"And now," said she to her father, after the rest of the family had gone out from breakfast, "it is worse for me than if I had permitted Charles Rushmere to court me."

"Not so, my Lucy, for you have obeyed your father, and your conscience is free from offence," replied Isaac Marlow. "Have patience, Lucy, and things may even yet work together for your good."

"Ah," said Lucy, "how is that to be, if Charles Rushmere dies?"

"He is worth many dead men yet," returned her father.

Lucy busied herself in putting away the breakfast things to conceal her tears. While she was thus occupied, her sisters came running in, crying, "Oh, Lucy, Lucy, what do you think? — old Mr. Rushmere has sent his droll high-backed old green shaycart to fetch you to Scrapeton Grange this morning."

"Has he sent it for me?" inquired Lucy, turning pale. "Are you sure of that, Anne?"

"Certainly! old Jonas, who has come to drive you, told us so, and begged 'that you would come as quickly as possible, for his master did not wish him to lose half a day's work, if it could be helped.'"

"Father," said Lucy, "may I go?"

“Go, my child,” replied her father, “if it is your wish.”

Jane had already flown to fetch her sister's Sunday bonnet and shawl, and Lucy, who was always neat, tarried not to make any change in her household garb; but almost before Mr. Rushmere's envoy thought she had been made acquainted with the nature of his errand, she came forth in readiness to obey the welcome summons. Jonas gave her an approving smile, and nodded to himself as she took her seat in the antiquated vehicle by his side; and as they jolted and rumbled together out of the yard, Polly Jones testified her lively sympathy and good-will towards her young mistress, by throwing an old shoe after her for luck.

CHAPTER IV.

LUCY was half way on the road to Scrapeton before she could command her voice to ask old Jonas “how Mr. Charles Rushmere was?”

“Lord love your heart, he'll do well enough now, I'll warrant him,” was the cheering reply of the sagacious driver.

“Then he is not dying!”

“Oh, lauk, no, miss! nor half so bad as I was when I was crossed in love fifty years ago. I tell you what, miss, I have heard of some young

women as have fretted themselves to dead for *sich* like ; but men ar'n't so tender-hearted : for, you see, miss, they has other things to occupy their time and thoughts. Not, miss, but what our young master have vexed *hisself* good tidily about you, and so our master thinks, or else he would not have bundled me off so early this morning to fetch you. But our Sukey is partly to be thanked for that, for she put it into his head that Master Charles would have a *faver* or *information* of the heart with fretting so about you, miss. Master fared very queer, I promise you, when he heard that on the night after his other son's *fineral* too. 'So,' says he, 'there's a real physicshin from London now at the Angel, what came to see old my Lord, and we'll hear what he thinks of Master Charles : run, Jonas, and tell him to step this way.' So I gived the doctor a bit of a hint, as we comed along ; and when he had felt our young master's pulse, he looked wherry solemn, and shaked his head. Says he, 'It is all in the heart, which have brought on alarming *simpkins* of another *natur*, for which I must write a *description*.' Then our master, when he had got the *description* made out, though he could not read one word of it, was forced to give doctor a golden guinea ; for this was a real physicshin wot was staying at the Angel, you know. The *description* was every word of it in Latin, such as would have posed

anybody but the parson, and I do believe there was a deal of popery in it. Howsomever, the *description* did our young master no good at all, as how should it? Then says old Sukey, says she, 'I can give you the best *description* for Master Charles after all, only you won't be ruled by me, sir, I s'pose.' 'But,' says master, 'Sukey, I *wool*, if you are sure it won't be too late.' Then says she to master again, 'While there's life there's hope, and to be sure you won't be a *Barbary hen* to your own son, now he's like to lie on his young deathbed.'

"Master took her meaning, and told me, 'to get out the old *shay*-cart, and brush it up a bit,' which was only decent for me to do, for it had stood on one side, in the cart-shed, ever since our mistress's *fineral*, and the hens had got to roost along the high back of it, so that I had fine work to clean it up, as you may *s'pose*; and when I had got it a *little* tidy, and dusted the cushion, which was right fusty and full of moths, with lying up in a corner of the collar-house so long, he ordered me to go and fetch you, Miss Lucy, the first thing in the morning, if so be you would be pleased to come and see poor dear Master Charles."

Jonas had never in all his life met with an auditor who listened to his prosing with the interest Lucy bestowed on this narrative.

When Lucy arrived at Scrapeton Grange, she

felt some trepidation at the anticipation of an interview with the father of her lover, but Jonas, as if guessing her thoughts, said, "Apray, miss, don't go to scare yourself about our master, for it ain't at all likely you'll see him."

"How so?" demanded Lucy in surprise.

"Why, our master is a very queer old fellow; but I says nothing."

Mrs. Sukey Scratchet, now came forth in a clean starched muslin apron and high-crowned cap, to receive and welcome Lucy, and to act as mistress of the ceremonies in ushering her into the presence of her sick lover.

Charles Rushmere, when the weeping Lucy approached the old-fashioned settee on which his emaciated form reclined, drew her gently to him, and whispered,

"She came; his cold hand softly touch'd,
And bathed with many a tear;
Fast falling o'er the primrose pale,
So morning dews appear."

"Ah, Charles, if you only knew how often I have cried over that ballad of late!" sobbed Lucy in the fulness of her heart.

"If you please, Miss Marlow," interrupted Mistress Sukey, putting her head in at the door, "master desires his compliments to you, and hopes you will excuse his dining at home to-day, if so be as you and Master Charles can make yourselves comfortable to dine together alone on

a roast fowl, with white bacon and egg sauce, and a bread pudding, at one o'clock."

"Mr. Rushmere is very kind, I am sure," said Lucy.

"And remarkably considerate too," added Charles, with a smile. "Tell him we are greatly obliged to him, and shall be very comfortable without him."

"Lauk, Master Charles, he know that well enough; and that is the reason he go out to-day," rejoined Mistress Sukey.

At five o'clock Mistress Sukey again made her appearance to bring up an excellent tea for their refreshment, having got out the best old china service, and silver teapot, in honour of Lucy's visit, and spread a collation, such as is seldom seen, save in an old-fashioned Suffolk farm-house, for the five o'clock meal. In fact, it represents a *petit diner* of the most enjoyable description, with delicately cut ham, rolled in thin slices of new white bread and butter. Cold chicken, fruit tart, cream cheese, hot buttered cake, new brown loaf, delicious butter printed in some pretty pattern, swimming in the cold clear water, in a covered butter glass, strawberry jam, a light seed cake, hot from the oven, rusks, hollow biscuits and *jumballs*, and above all, that provincial dainty made of pie-crust, and esteemed above all others, called a *short-cake*. This was not the common fare at Scrapeton Grange, but Mistress Sukey

Scratchet was determined to atone to Charles for her former churlish conduct, touching the tea and toast, by providing "a proper good tea," for him and Miss Lucy, as the old gentleman had enjoined her to make them as comfortable as she could.

So she had made plenty of what she termed "*sunkets*" for the occasion, and entreated them to do justice to it to please her.

Lucy thought the formidable Mrs. Sukey Scratchet (of whose "ugly temper" Charles had often complained) was the kindest creature in the parish, and told her so. And Sukey, affectionately patting her on the shoulder, rejoined, "Well, and who wouldn't be kind to the likes of you?"

At seven o'clock, precisely, the green *shay* was at the door, and old Jonas ready to drive Lucy back to Woodfield; and she had the satisfaction of perceiving that Charles Rushmere was visibly amended by her visit.

"Lucy," whispered he, as he led her to the door, "you are the best physician, dearest."

"I'm thinking, Master Charles," observed Sukey, "I may just *cop* all that doctor's stuff what came from the *chemister's* yesterday on to the muck-heap."

"Why, yes," replied Charles, smiling, "unless you can persuade my father to take it himself, for it is of no use to me."

"P'raps sir," said Jonas, in an insinuating tone,

“you would ’stow it on me, for my old woman, for she have got the *rheumatis* in her knee, and it might do her good. She’s always *axing* me to get her some doctor’s stuff, and she’ll be properly pleased with them butiful pills, and the pretty bottle of red-*faver* drink that cost such a lot of money.”

“You are heartily welcome to both, Jonas, and I hope they may cure old Molly’s lame knee,” returned Charles, “so that she may be able to dance at my wedding.”

A few days afterwards, Charles was sufficiently recovered to be able to ride over to Woodfield to return Lucy’s visit, which his father intimated to him would only be a civil thing. At the end of a month, Charles was reinstated in the occupation of White-thorn farm; and a few days after, Mr. Rushmere called at the wheelwright’s house, where he found Lucy very busy kneading bread, while Polly was heating the oven. The old man condescended to commend Lucy’s method of making up her loaves, asked for a mug of beer, in order to ascertain her skill in brewing, gave a scrutinising glance at the general neat appearance of the kitchen, and then walked off to the workshop, where he abruptly informed Isaac Marlow “that his business with him was to hear how soon it would suit him to spare Lucy to be his son’s wife.”

“If you ask me when it will suit me to spare

my Lucy, I should say never," was the reply of the fond parent, "for she is my greatest comfort on earth; but as it is her happiness, not my own, I should think of, I suppose I must make up my mind to part with her as soon as one of her sisters is old enough to take her place."

"No, no, Mr. Marlow; my son wants his wife home before harvest; and if he can't have her now, I shall make him take some one else (that is, if I can). But I had better send him to talk to you about it, for she seems the sort of girl to suit us."

That very day Charles came and pleaded his cause so movingly to the father of his Lucy, that Isaac Marlow consented to their immediate union.

Lucy was loth to leave her father with so young a housekeeper as Anne, who was scarcely twelve years old; "but, then," as she observed, "both Anne and Jane were very handy, and had learned many useful things of her, and Polly was now seventeen, and had got into nice neat ways and she should herself be living near enough to come and help them on baking days, and any other times when they required assistance or advice."

So the matter was settled, and on midsummer day Anne and Jane officiated as bridesmaids to their happy sister. Polly Jones, not the least delighted of the party, gained a new gown and a white ribbon from the bridegroom.

III.

KATE WILSON ; A SEA-SIDE WOOING.

CHAPTER I.

IN the little maritime port of Shore-end, the seafaring portion of the inhabitants forms a distinct and peculiar class, divided and subdivided into gradations, according to their rank in the queen's or the merchants' service.

The families of lieutenants in the navy and marines are generally on terms of civility and good fellowship with those of the masters or captains, as they are styled, per courtesy, of the merchant vessels, but they would consider it a great infringement of their dignity if they descended a step lower in their associations. The wives and daughters of mates and pilots are reckoned on a footing with those of boat-builders, rope-spinners, and shopkeepers, but never condescend to mix with those of common seamen, though always ready to exchange civil greetings, and to render them any friendly offices in their power.

The seafaring community and their families are among the happiest, most independent, and virtuous of the inhabitants of the town. The bearing of the men is, generally speaking, frank, manly, and courteous; that of the females modest, intelligent, and sprightly. Their houses wear an air of great comfort, and display more taste in their arrangements than those of the tradespeople and fourth-rate gentry.

The parlour of George Wilson, the mate of the "Lovely Kitty," gave people the idea of a mermaid's bower, so fancifully was it decorated with pearly shells, branches of coral, masses of crystal, sea-horses' teeth, unicorns' horns, drinking goblets made of ostrich-eggs and carved cocoa-nuts, and other curiosities from foreign parts, interspersed with rich china, and carved ivory toys, with festoons of amber beads and Indian peas, pendent from the gay Chinese pictures with which the walls were decorated.

Catherine Wilson, the mate's eldest daughter, was the smiling nymph by whose active care all these treasures were arranged and kept in order. She took a peculiar pride in making things smart and comfortable, and much devolved on her. She was the eldest of a family of ten, and, the earnings of a mate in a small trading vessel being inadequate to their maintenance, her mother had opened a small shop for the sale of tea, coffee, snuff, and small articles of

haberdashery. This was entirely confided to the management of Catherine, whose engaging manners invited custom, and, as some of the nautical purchasers declared, "*bewitched* the money out of their pockets."

With so many agreeable qualifications, both of mind and person, it cannot be supposed that Catherine Wilson was not provided with a lover; especially in a maritime town, like Shore-end, where few girls attain the age of twenty without being "bespoken," as the sailors say; but unfortunately, like many other inexperienced maidens in her class of life, she had entangled herself in an unsuitable engagement, by accepting the addresses of the first man who offered. This was no other than a dandified young tailor, who had just returned from London, where, to use his own expression, "he had been studying for improvement at a distinguished establishment in New Bond-street."

Mr. Abel Sewell, or, as he emphatically accented himself, Sew-well, was a tall, slim, sentimental-looking young man, with a pink and white complexion, and light curling hair. He had recently opened a small, but very spruce-looking shop, which he called "The Emporium of Fashion," in virtue of a show-board in the window, full of absurd-looking figures, in every possible attitude of conceit and affectation, intended to represent gentle-

men attired in the most approved modes of Paris and London. This *tableau* was the admiration of all the apprentices and children in Shore-end ; but Mr. Abel never permitted groups of the latter to impede his light by congregating before his window to contemplate it.

He always exhibited on his own person a coat cut according to the pattern of the morning costume of the gentlemen on his show-board, which made a great impression on the hearts of the dress-makers and other humble votareesses of fashion in his native town. He appeared at first difficult in his choice, but at length manifested a predilection in favour of Catherine Wilson, by sundry small but pointed attentions, and by degrees insinuated himself into her favour by purchasing his threads, tapes, silk, and buttons at her shop, and presenting her with all his snips to knit into shred-mats and hearthrugs.

The daily visits of so good a customer of course afforded Kate some pleasure, and no one but a knitter of shred-mats and rugs can form any idea of the lively feelings of gratitude which a constant supply of snips, of new and varied colours, was calculated to excite in her bosom.

Mr. Abel Sewell was not exactly the sort of person whom Kate would have wished to marry,

but she was amused and pleased with his attentions, and every one rallied her about his evident passion for her, till she felt a sort of foolish consciousness whenever his name was mentioned, which caused her to blush when she met him by accident, but more especially when he entered the shop. Then Mr. Abel Sewell began to blush in return, and to say foolish things in commendation of her beauty and good sense, till she naturally fell in with the general opinion that he would make an excellent husband; and, as she liked no one in the town better, and had no intention of dying an old maid, she permitted Mr. Abel Sewell to consider her as his future spouse.

Some of the neighbours marvelled that Mr. Sewell, senior, who was reported to be a man of substance, and combined in his own person the offices of churchwarden and postmaster of Shore-end, should sanction his only son's engagement with the daughter of so large a family; while others were even more astonished that pretty Kate Wilson condescended to keep company with a tailor, and predicted that it never would be a match.

After a time, however, the busy-bodies of Shore-end got so accustomed to see pretty Kate Wilson attended to and from church, and accompanied in her walks, by Mr. Abel Sewell, that they ceased to express surprise at their

proceedings, and began to wonder at something else.

At the end of six months, Mr. Abel Sewell began to invest certain small sums in silver teaspoons, glass, and crockery-ware, and to attend auctions, where his bids and occasional purchases made it apparent to the observing members of the community that he was meditating an immediate change in his condition.

Moreover, he assumed unwonted looks and airs of solemnity whenever he walked with Kate, after the business of the day was ended, and spent much time in reconnoitring every spruce, new-built messuage in the town that appeared to afford capabilities for becoming a comfortable dwelling-house, as well as a suitable "Emporium of Fashion," his present "emporium" being under his father's roof at the post-office, a very good situation for business, but not "eligible for a married man," he said.

His betrothed exhibited very little emotion on these interesting discussions. She had been accustomed to say, "she would have a pretty red-brick house, with a green door and window shutters, for her future abode, with a little bit of garden-ground behind for the cultivation of choice flowers;" but the more Abel Sewell talked of *their* house, the less inclination did she feel to listen to him, and at last she begged him "not to be in any hurry about engaging

one, for the present, for she was sure she could not be spared at home yet."

"Not spared at home yet!" echoed the tailor, with lively indignation; "I should be glad to know whose wishes and convenience ought to be consulted on that point?"

"My father's, I suppose," said Kate.

"Oh, indeed, and that of the nine dear children, I suppose?"

Kate looked at Mr. Abel Sewell with surprise, and he proceeded, "If you think more of them than you do of me, you had better stay with them altogether, ma'am."

"I begin to be of that opinion myself, sir," retorted Kate, rousing herself from the lethargic calm in which she had remained ever since she had considered herself the *fiancée* of Mr. Abel Sewell.

"You cannot be of that opinion, ma'am," said he. "Give me leave to assure you that you have been an object of envy for the last three years to all the young ladies in this town."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Kate, smiling.

"It is a fact," said Abel, impressively, "but I do not wish to boast, nor yet to insist too much on my own merits and expectations; all I shall say is, that I see reason to repent of having made choice of so insensible a person for my future partner."

"It is well you repent before your choice is irrevocable," returned Kate, "for I am perfectly willing to resign you."

"To resign me, do you say?—me, Mr. Abel Sewell! I would advise you to think twice before you are guilty of such rashness," exclaimed the tailor.

"I have already thought on the subject more than twice," said Catherine, "and have made up my mind to acknowledge that I have been very foolish."

"Oh, you have, Miss Kitty, have you?" responded the tailor; "but now, if I accept your apology, and agree to marry you after all, I am afraid I shall never have my house, that is to be, free from brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law; it is a dangerous thing to marry into such a numerous family."

"You need not be alarmed, sir," said Catherine, "my brothers and sisters will never be any trouble to you, neither have I any apology to offer, and so good evening to you, Mr. Abel Sewell. I am very happy that we have come to a proper understanding of our unsuitableness for each other before it was too late."

With those words she left him, and hastening home, bounded into the little parlour behind her shop, exclaiming with great vehemence, "Mother, I am not going to be a tailor's wife after all; Abel Sewell has conducted himself in a very

unhandsome manner this afternoon, and we have parted for ever."

Kate had vented her indignant feelings in these words, ending with the sage observation, "Dear mother, how selfish men are!" before she was aware of the presence of a smart maritime beau, a perfect stranger, withal, who was sitting behind the door of the back parlour.

"Bless my heart!" cried her mother, "how you are running on, Kate, and letting all the world into your secrets: don't you see there is a gentleman in the room?"

"Indeed," said Kate, in great confusion, "I beg the gentleman's pardon, but it is so dark I mistook him for my father."

"What a goose the girl is," ejaculated the mother, "not to know an old man from a young one! However, I will get a light, for the gentleman is a customer, and has been waiting your return for the last half hour, as I could not find the doe-skin gloves."

"I am sorry the gentleman has had to wait," said Catherine.

"Never mind; I had nothing particular to occupy my time," said the stranger, "and your good mother has been spinning me a long yarn to keep up my spirits while I waited."

Kate was vexed when she heard this, for her mother had a foolish habit of telling long stories to every one who would give her a patient hearing,

and she feared maternal vanity had led her to make her good qualities the burden of the tale. The entrance of the candle increased her confusion by revealing the gay and gallant appearance of the very handsome stranger, whom she had inadvertently made a confidant of the rupture of her recent matrimonial engagement and breach of contract with Abel Sewell, the tailor.

"He is certainly a naval officer, or a mate of an East-Indiaman," thought Catherine, as she opened the paper of best doe-skin gloves.

The stranger did not rank quite so highly in the nautical world as Catherine imagined ; he was the master, captain per courtesy, of the good ship Wallace of Leith, bound for the port of Hamburgh. His vessel had received some trifling damage off the Barnet reef during a smart gale on the preceding night, and he had put it into Shore-end harbour for necessary repairs.

"It is an ill wind that blows no good to any one," he added, as he perused the countenance of the blushing Catherine, "for, if this accident had not occurred, you would not have sold half-a-dozen pair of gloves this evening."

"They are three and sixpence a pair, sir," said Catherine, in some surprise at the magnificence of the purchase.

Captain Mac Donnell flung down a sovereign and a shilling, and receiving the dainty little white packet from the hands of the pretty

marchande with a profound obeisance, he tucked it into his waistcoat pocket with a merry glance, and, bidding "good even" to Kate and her mother, departed.

"He is a bonny Scot," said Mrs. Wilson, looking after him; "I wish your father had been in the way to have asked him to take his bread and cheese with us to-night."

"It is not often we take gold after tea, mother," observed Catherine, when she had duly entered the sum in her cash-book. "I wonder whether he will ever come to Shore-end again."

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning, Kate went to take a walk with her little sisters before breakfast, and saw the Leith vessel was at the pier still. As she returned, she heard some of the sailors say that "the Wallace would not be fit for sea for several days."

In the afternoon, Captain Mac Donnell paid another visit to her shop, and made purchase of a purse and a black silk cravat, and being very difficult in his choice of these articles, fully occupied Catherine's time till her father came home to tea. The honest mate, whose heart warmed at the sight of a blue jacket, invited the

master of the Wallace to partake of that meal with him and his family, as he was a stranger in Shore-end.

Mac Donnell accepted the invitation as frankly as it was given, and appeared to enjoy the repast exceedingly. He bestowed great commendations on the neatness of the little parlour, and admired all Catherine's arrangements. When he took his leave, he observed "that it would have been a sin and a shame for such a lassie to have thrown herself away on a pitiful tailor."

"Don't set your heart on yonder bonny Scot, Kitty," said her father to Catherine, "for he is but a bird of passage, and may never come in our way again, and, for aught we know to the contrary, may be a married man."

Kate felt an uneasy sensation when the possibility of such a circumstance was suggested. The same afternoon, a Shore-end busy-body entered her shop, and, after making purchase of an ounce of Scotch snuff, obliged her with the information that "the captain of the Leith vessel was going to marry a rich old gentlewoman, the sister of his owner, who had been in love with him ever since he was an apprentice," and added "that her name was Mac Laggan, and the captain had written to her since he had been at Shore-end."

"And how come you so well informed as to

Captain Mac Donnell's private affairs, Mrs. Barker?" asked Kate.

"Why, lauk, my dear, I don't know it of myself, but I heard it from very good authority," responded the dame; "don't you know that your husband that was to be, young Mr. Abel Sewell, *have* an own cousin living at Leith, and he says 'it is a real shame that this here Captain what-you-call-em, should be coming to your shop every day, and drinking tea with the family of the Wilsons on *fictious* pretences.'"

"What pretences, ma'am, do you mean?" asked Kate, looking steadily at the gossip.

"Why, there, my dear, don't you *fare* so innocent about it."

"About what?"

"Why everybody say he make himself welcome here by courting you."

"Indeed!" said Kate.

"Yes, and Abel Sewell say you have used him very ill, and he did not think you had been the sort of girl you are."

"Mrs. Barker, there is your change," said Kate, "and will you have the goodness to attend to your own affairs, and leave mine to my own management."

"Oh, certainly, only I thought it would be a pity for you to be deceived by this Scotch captain, when you might have such a pains-taking young man as Abel Sewell, and you

know, my dear, a bird in hand is worth two in the bush, and the captain is all the same as a married man."

"What captain are you talking of, ma'am?" demanded a voice behind Mrs. Barker, whose genuine northern accent startled our Suffolk gossip into a half shriek. Kate looked up with a blush of surprise and shame, and encountered the bright blue eyes of the master of the Wallace.

"They say listeners never hear any good of themselves," observed the captain, smiling.

"Apray, sir, have you heard all we have been saying?" asked Mrs. Barker, in a great fright, but determined to ascertain the worst.

"Yes, madam," replied the captain, boldly.

"Oh, indeed, sir. Well, sir, I beg your pardon; but indeed, sir, we did not mean any harm."

"*We!*" ejaculated Catherine, indignantly.

Mac Donnell laughed.

"I should have liked to have heard a few more of your sayings, bonnie lassie; but you are a good one to deal with gossips."

"I am afraid, sir, the rich old gentlewoman at Leith will hear more of your proceedings at Shore-end than may be agreeable to her," observed Catherine, demurely.

"The only old gentlewoman at Leith who takes any particular interest in my proceedings

is my aunt Dorothy, God bless her ! and she is not the sister, but the wife of my owner, Mr. Mac Laggan ; so, my bonny bird, I have small chance of becoming her husband, even if she were to be his widow," said the captain.

Goody Barker slunk out of the shop in utter confusion. Kate began to smooth some ruffled skeins of silk. A long pause ensued. Kate wished the captain would relieve her embarrassment by departing, and yet dreaded an interruption of their *tête-à-tête*. At last she broke the silence by asking him "if she could have the pleasure of serving him with anything ?"

"No," replied the captain, "nothing that can be bought," and again a pause ensued.

Catherine had smoothed all her skeins of silk, and tied them neatly up in a piece of leather, before she ventured to look up. The Scotch captain continued all this time standing with his hand on the counter and his eyes fixed on her face.

At last he said, "Catherine, how came you to quarrel with that tailor ?"

"It was he that quarrelled with me, I believe," said Catherine.

"It is my opinion that he wishes to make it up with you," observed the captain, "for it was he that sent yonder old gossip to poison your mind about me."

"I believe you are right," said Catherine, "but I would rather die than become his wife."

"Did you ever love him?"

"No."

"Yet you encouraged his addresses, it seems."

"I was very young, and did not know my own mind at that time."

"Do you think you should know it now?" asked the captain.

Kate was about to reply in the affirmative, when the shop-bell rang ostentatiously, and in bounced Goody Barker's sister, to change the lately purchased ounce of Scotch snuff for an ounce of Irish snuff, Mrs. Barker having asked for the former article by mistake. The master of the Wallace took up his cap in a huff and departed.

The interruption was the more provoking, as the Shore-end shipwrights announced that "the Wallace would be fit for sea on the following day." Mac Donnell came in the evening, however, to take leave of Catherine and her family, and, as he shook hands with Mrs. Wilson, after thanking her for her hospitality, he said, "One of these days you will see me again, mayhap."

His leave-taking with the mate's daughter was silent; it consisted only in an exchange of

glances; but these, like masonic signs, implied more to each other than was understood by the lookers-on.

The next morning they met on the beach, and the master of the Wallace, taking Kate Wilson by the hand, asked her a plain question, to which she made as frank a reply.

The question was, "Whether she could like him well enough to marry him and live with him at Leith?" and Kate replied, "She felt assured she could."

"But Kitty, my love," said he, "you are a slippery lass, you know; see you don't make such a goose of me as you did of the poor tailor."

"Oh, dear, no," said Catherine, "you are a very different person from him."

"Aye, aye, bonnie lassie; but you may meet with a more likely lad than Donald Mac Donnell, when I am sailing the salt seas."

"I will give you leave to try my constancy," replied Kate; "but see you don't buy gloves at any other shop than mine."

"No fear, no fear; I have gloves enough to last till we meet again."

"When will that be?" asked Kate.

"In six months, perhaps, but it may be longer, if it should, I will write; but hold yourself in readiness to be married at an hour's notice; for the next time the Wallace passes your roads

I shall put in for you, if your parents will allow you to become my wife."

Catherine acquainted her parents with what had passed, but besought her mother to keep the matter a profound secret.

Mrs. Wilson never could keep a secret in her life, and such a secret as this there was so much pleasure in revealing, that, before the Wallace was fairly out of the roads, she had made half-a-dozen of the most notable gossips in Shore-end acquainted with the whole arrangement, and it was forthwith predicted by them and their coadjutors, "that the Scotch captain was making a fool of Kate Wilson," and they all laughed at the idea of his return to scorn.

When the six months from his departure had expired and he came not, the exultation of these prophets of evil knew no bounds, and Mrs. Wilson saw reason to repent of having needlessly bestowed her confidence on those who had made her daughter's disappointment the amusement of the whole town.

Mr. Abel Sewell, in particular, had much to say on the subject, and told every one "that Catherine had never received a single letter from the fine Scotch captain for whom she had jilted him, no, nor ever would."

Catherine, when this observation was repeated to her by some of the retail-dealers in second-hand malice, said very pointedly, "Mr. Abel

Sewell lives at the post-office, and has of course good reason to know that *I* have not received any letters from Captain Mac Donnell."

CHAPTER III.

THE next six months passed wearily away; they were marked not only by the pangs of hope deferred, embittered by the sneers of foes and the scarcely less painful condolences of injudicious friends, but by a pressure of domestic trials and calamities. Her father had expended his all in the purchase of a share in a vessel, which, after a prosperous voyage, was lost with her cargo. His own life and the lives of the crew were saved, only by a sort of providential interposition, after they had been two or three days and nights in an open boat struggling with the waves. George Wilson returned home a ruined man, sick and dejected, soon after his wife had increased his already numerous family by giving birth to twins.

"I am sure," said Catherine, on whom the whole care and the chief of the toil requisite at this trying season devolved, "it was all for the best that Donald Mac Donnell was unable to keep his promise of coming for me at the

appointed time, for what could my dear father have done without me ? ”

So much was required of Catherine that she had no time to think of anything but the fulfilment of her daily duties, and she performed them all, nobly and uncomplainingly. Spring returned, and her father, through her good nursing and excellent management, recovered his health and spirits, and obtained the promise of another ship. Her mother was able to resume her post in the household, and the twins began to run about.

“ We shall be ourselves again soon,” said Catherine, cheerfully, one evening, when she joined the family circle round the tea-table, after shutting up her little shop.

“ And as happy as ever, my girl, in spite of all our trials,” replied her father.

“ They have been all for our good, doubtless,” observed Catherine, stealthily removing an unbidden tear, but not unnoticed by her father.

“ Somehow,” said he, “ I wish that Leith ship had made the port of Jericho rather than our harbour; but Kate, my child, I won’t have you waste your time, and fade your bloom away, in waiting for one who only meant to make a fool of you, when there is an honest young fellow in this town who would fain take you to wife.”

“ My dear father, never name that odious tailor to me again.”

"Oh, no, it is not the tailor, but a fine manly fellow whom I should be proud of for a son-in-law, Ned Palmer, the boat-builder. He spoke to me about it to-day, and, if you have a mind to please me, you will take him and think no more of that fair-spoken weathercock."

"My good father," said Catherine, "I will never be the wife of any other than Donald Mac Donnell. I have no doubts respecting his honour and his truth; I gave him leave to try my constancy, and he will come for me one of these days, when we least expect him."

"Positively, I have no patience with your folly, Kate!" interrupted her mother; "you have made yourself the laughing-stock of the whole town by making preparations, eighteen months and more ago, for a man coming on shore to marry and carry you away, who had no more intention of doing it than the Pope of Rome, and I never pass that box which stands corded and sewn up in the tarpaulin wrapper, in the corner of your bed-room, without giving it a kick."

"Which kick would be better bestowed on Mac Donnell himself if he were within reach," observed her husband.

Kate ran up-stairs and pushed the box under her bed, that it might not be an eye-sore to her mother any more. Now, though she was one of the best-tempered girls in the world, she possessed some degree of pride and a high

spirit; and—why should I disguise the fact?—her mind was so much ruffled by her mother's mortifying remarks, that she passed the night in a tumult of restless and agitating thoughts, instead of the sweet sleep that generally succeeded her well-spent days. Finding herself ill at ease on her pillow, Catherine rose at an unusually early hour, and, by way of antidote to her mental disquiet, sought amusement in active domestic occupation, a plan we earnestly recommend to all damsels of her degree, for it is, generally speaking, a successful one.

Before the breakfast hour, Catherine had ironed and packed all her father's shirts and duck trousers, in readiness for his expected voyage; swept, scoured, and dusted the shop and parlour, and made a complete reformation in the arrangements of both; she then set the table and prepared the breakfast; and, by the time her parents, little brothers and sisters were assembled, she had thoroughly subdued all the irritability of feeling, induced by the jarring chord which had been so rudely touched upon by her mother. Her spirits had recovered their usual elastic tone, and when Mrs. Wilson injudiciously resumed the subject at breakfast, she said, "My dear mother, say no more about Captain Mac Donnell, for to-day at least; for were he to make his appearance, I am too much tired to go to church with him I fear."

Scarcely had the sentence passed her lips, when her eldest brother came in with a telescope in his hand, from the pilots' station on the cliff, and, looking archly in her face, exclaimed—

“Ha! ha! Kitty, there is a Leith vessel in the roads, and they are putting off a boat; so who knows if it be not your bonny Scotch captain coming for you?”

Tired as she was, Kate set down her cup of tea untasted, and, snatching the glass from her brother's hand, ran to the cliff, whence she descried plainly enough a vessel, very like the Wallace of Leith, in the bay, and a six-oared boat dashing through the billows in a fine style towards the shore. She thought she recognized the gallant-looking figure seated at the helm, but her glass grew misty.

“Now don't make a fool of yourself, Kate, there's a good girl,” cried her father, who had followed her, “for it is the Wallace, sure enough, and the captain is in the boat. See, he waves a flag to us.” Kate buried her face in her father's bosom, and vented her emotion in a passionate burst of tears.

A general cheer from the cliff welcomed the master of the Wallace when he leaped on shore, for the errand on which he came was pretty well known, and sailors are all on terms of good fellowship with each other, and mightily fond of a wedding.

The meeting between Mac Donnell and Catherine was rather more tender than perhaps beseemed its publicity, but the inhabitants of a sea-port town are used to scenes of the kind, and the manly hearts of our honest tars are always ready to afford unasked sympathy on such occasions.

“Kitty, my life,” said Mac Donnell, “are you ready to go to church with me?”

“This morning, Donald?”

“This hour, my sweet lassie. Is there ever a licence to be bought in this town?”

“Aye, aye,” said George Wilson, “our parson keeps them sort of things ready cut and dried in his own house, and I will step with you to see if we can persuade him to let you have one, while Kate runs home to tell her mother, and to put on her wedding-gown. It will be rather an old-fashioned one, captain, for she had it in readiness a year and a half ago, to my certain knowledge.”

“I trusted I had fully explained the unavoidable cause of my delay in my letters to Catherine, so as to stand acquitted of neglect,” said Mac Donnell.

“Letters!” echoed Wilson, “the deuce of a letter from you has ever reached my daughter’s hands.”

“That accounts then to me for Catherine’s mysterious silence,” said Mac Donnell. “Why,

my sweet lassie, I feared you had changed your mind again, as you never deigned to reply to any of my letters, and I have not written less than twenty since we parted."

"Did I not tell you so, father?" exclaimed Kate. "I always said that Donald Mac Donnell was true-hearted, and that it was Abel Sewell's spite to stop his letters, as he has the command of the post-office."

"Aye, the cast-off tailor! was he the thief who cabbaged my letters? If I had ten minutes to spare I would make him swallow his own goose," exclaimed the captain.

"My dear sir," said Wilson, "moderate your wrath, you have his girl and he your letters, and who is the best off I pray, you or he?"

CHAPTER IV.

NEVER did a bride make so hasty a *toilette* as Kate Wilson. Five minutes were all she was allowed for the purpose of exchanging her old stuff gown, and the rest of the suit in which she had performed so notable a morning's work, for her wedding garments, of pure and spotless white, that had been laid up so long in lavender for this occasion. She had not even time to snatch a

glance at her own lovely image in the glass when she had hurried on the white Norwich shawl and neat straw bonnet—no, not even to see if she had tied the satin bow becomingly, for her father was vociferating at the foot of the stairs—

“Come, stir yourself, Kate, or you won’t get married to-day. It is past eleven, and the parson and clerk are both in waiting at the church. Why, hallo, Kate! you take more time in rigging than a seventy-four.”

It was not without good cause that Wilson addressed these exhortations to his daughter, for the church was at the very extreme point of the town, and the bridal party had to exert more speed than the etiquette of such processions warranted, to arrive there in time for the solemnization of the nuptial rite within the canonical hours. The town-clock actually struck twelve just as the clerk pronounced the final Amen, and before the bride had written Catherine Wilson for the last time in the parish register.

Hasty as the bridal was, it was honoured with all the due tokens of joy by the inhabitants of Catherine’s native town; there were pealing of bells, firing pop-guns, and unfurling colours forthwith on the cliffs. Every house in the High street that could boast a flag hoisted it, and those who could not, displayed some article of gaily-coloured drapery by way of substitute,

producing a picturesque effect enough to those who looked not sufficiently into the minor details of the pageant to detect red and blue pocket-handkerchiefs, and patch-work counterpanes, floating from the humbler casement windows of the poor, in juxtaposition with union-jacks, custom-house and corporation flags, the pennons of pleasure-boats, and tattered ensigns of foreign vessels, which were converted on this day into banners of rejoicing.

The parting between the bride and her family was brief. The wind was so fair for Hamburg, and the master of the Wallace in such haste to pursue his voyage, that it was with difficulty he could be induced to stay and partake of the excellent lunch Mrs. Wilson had busied herself in preparing for the refection of the bridal party on their return from church.

"Nay, nay, captain," cried George Wilson, "after spoiling Kate's breakfast, it would be a little hard on her to carry her off without a lunch, when she has tarried your leisure so long and patiently, in spite of our doubts that you were playing fast and loose with us all."

"My Catherine never doubted me," replied Mac Donnell, casting a loving glance on his smiling bride.

"Then see you use her well," said her mother, "for she is a treasure, though I say it who should not; and how we shall spare her, and

what we shall do without her, I dare not trust myself to think."

"Oh, mother, mother!" cried the bride, bursting into tears, "how could I wish to leave you?"

"Nay, nay, my sweet lassie, ye must e'en do as she did before ye when she married your father," cried the bridegroom; "and I'll ne'er give you cause to repent forsaking father and mother and cleaving to Donald Mac Donnell."

Kate, nothing doubting, allowed her hastily wedded husband to draw her arm through his, and lead her from under the paternal roof. The afore-mentioned carefully corded box, which contained her humble *trousseau*, having been dragged from under her bed by two of the brothers, was carried before her in triumph, as, attended by all the family, and a numerous train of friends and neighbours following in the rear, she proceeded to the beach, and was handed into the boat amidst the cheers and congratulations of the sailors, and the good wishes of the inhabitants of Shore-end.

Mrs. Mac Donnell spent her honeymoon at Hamburgh, and, on her homeward voyage, enjoyed the pleasure of surprising her parents with a visit, and, as it was a Sunday when the Wallace put into Shore-end Bay, she astonished the whole town by making her appearance at church in her matronly dignity, clad in silken tire, and

leaning on the arm of her handsome Scotch husband.

The following spring, her father and eldest brother, when they made a voyage to the north, took the opportunity of visiting their beloved Catherine, whom they found the happiest and best of wives, occupying one of the prettiest houses in Leith, and charming all her husband's friends with her English neatness and excellent housewifery.

IV.

BARAK JOHNSON AND THE BLIND WITNESS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was in the parish of Woodfield a stern and solitary man named Barak Johnson, who was generally respected for the strict morality of his life, though the austerity of his manners rendered him an object of dislike to the young and thoughtless. He was a native of Cumberland, and spoke with a strong northern accent, which made his naturally harsh tones peculiarly unmusical to East Anglian ears. He had once been engaged in trade, but having acquired a moderate competence, he considered himself called upon to avoid the snares and temptations with which Mammon daily besets his votaries, and retired from business. His frugal habits enabled him to live comfortably on his little savings, and he commenced a course of life conformable to his professions.

Prayer-meetings were held at his house once a week. He became a subscriber to certain religious societies, passed all his time in theological studies, and was esteemed, by those of his own peculiar tenets, as an eminently pious character. His mind was, however, strongly tinged with gloom and bigotry, to which was added no slight tincture of spiritual pride; and while he looked upon three-fourths of mankind as vessels of wrath, formed and fitted for destruction, he considered himself one of the favoured few who were chosen and predestined to eternal blessedness, and that it was impossible for him to stumble, much less to fall from the state of grace to which he had attained.

In person and manners Barak Johnson was singularly unprepossessing. He was dark-complexioned, approaching to swarthinness, and his features were harsh and strongly marked. His figure, though athletic and powerful, was ungainly, and his deportment solemn and ungraceful. His temper was irritable, and he was by nature a man of violent passions, which in the perilous season of youth had betrayed him into occasional excesses; but latterly he had so greatly mastered his perverse inclinations, that he was wont to boast "of having completely trampled Satan under his feet," and that "he trusted he should be enabled to resist all his devices, in whatever form they might assail him."

The house in which Barak Johnson lived, in the entrance of the village, did not front the street, but looked into a pretty little garden, belonging to an adjoining dwelling, of which his windows commanded a view, and were in turn commanded by those of the aforesaid tenement. When Barak Johnson first settled in the neighbourhood, the next house was tenanted by a serious family, with whom he lived on terms of friendship; but after some years the property passed into other hands, and the house was let to people of a different way of thinking.

Barak Johnson was uneasy at the change. His new neighbour was a widower, with two daughters. The name of this person was John Waters, and he carried on the business of a ladies' shoemaker, in which he was assisted by his eldest daughter, Sarah, who bound and trimmed the shoes, and attended to the domestic affairs. Phillis, the younger, who was remarkably pretty, and considered herself the *belle* of Woodfield, pursued the more elegant and lucrative business of a milliner, by which she was enabled to gratify her inordinate love of dress. Her manners were marked with more than the usual flippancy of her calling; she was, moreover, a finished coquette, and was wont to boast "that she could command the attentions

of a different lover for every day in the week, and two for a Sunday."

It may easily be imagined that the vicinity of such a neighbour was anything but agreeable to Barak Johnson. Indeed, the first sight of Phillis in her Sunday finery filled him with indignation, and he considered it a buffet of Satan's own inflicting, when he found he should be exposed to the impertinent curiosity, ogling, and overlooking of a damsel of her appearance. Phillis was no less disgusted with the manners and exterior of the stern and solitary recluse, whom she contemptuously denominated "a sour old puritan," and resolved to take every opportunity of tormenting, acting much as the Jezebel in "The Spectator" is described to have done in order to captivate the Templar lodger in the opposite house.

Whenever Barak Johnson was at home, Phillis was sure to establish her work-table at the window of her little parlour, or to take that opportunity for tending her geraniums, which were ranged in neat order on a green stand in the garden; bestowing on them a far greater portion of her time than Barak considered by any means necessary.

Then she had a Barbary dove in a cage, which she hung just outside the glass-door that opened on the little grass-plot, and she would sometimes visit this pretty captive to caress and talk non-

sense to him half-a-dozen times in an hour, to the infinite disturbance of her ascetic neighbour, who was an unwilling observer of all her follies. He bestowed the severest censures on Phillis whenever her name was mentioned, and always concluded by declaring "that if he had not rashly made purchase of his house, he would remove to a distant quarter of the village, to escape the hourly annoyances to which he was subjected by this vain and carnal-minded daughter of Belial."

These observations were not long in reaching the ears of Phillis, and in the pride of conscious beauty she resolved to make him feel the power of the charms he had contemned. In pursuance of this design she continued to assail him from every possible point of attack. St. Kevin was not more pertinaciously pursued by the fair Cathleen, "with eyes of most unholy blue," than was Barak Johnson by the persevering coquetries of his provoking neighbour. He could not come to the window for a moment without being exposed to the whole artillery of her airs and graces. She deliberately tried the effect of every cap and bonnet she made on him, as soon as completed, by placing it on her own head, then turning her fair face toward his window, and asking his opinion of it in dumb show. If he either maintained a stern, immovable countenance, or replied to these

impertinences with gestures of reproof or contempt, she would shake her head, and make an ostentatious display of altering the disposition of the bows, and then trying it on again, silently demand his suffrage.

Barak Johnson, though little skilled in the wiles of female flirtation, began to entertain something like a suspicion that all these caps were impudently set at him.

Much as he was annoyed at the idea, his attention was involuntarily captivated by the proceedings of the fair *artiste*, for there is a peculiar fascination for the eyes of some men in feminine handicrafts, and the employments of Phillis Waters were so various and so amusing, that, having nothing else to do, Barak Johnson, though he anathematized the tawdry materials and extravagant shapes of every fresh cap, toque, or *bonnet* she commenced, could not refrain from watching the progress of each, as it passed through her hands, with an indefinable feeling of interest, which at last was mingled with a desire of seeing on herself the effect of the article when finished. Next he began to wonder how it was possible that such monstrous fabrics of gauze, ribbon, and flowers, could appear so much the reverse of frightful when Phillis tried them on.

CHAPTER II.

BARAK JOHNSON now began to spend more time in looking out of the window, and less in his theological studies; but he was not yet aware of his peril, and would have repelled the charge with scorn, if any one had told him he could be capable of the absurdity of falling in love with such a vain worldly-minded girl as Phillis Waters.

Alas! poor man, he was not aware that he was possessed of no less vanity than the young beauty whose frivolity and self-conceit he condemned. It was, in fact, through that weak point that he became vulnerable to her attacks, till he was at length guilty of the folly of fancying that Phillis Waters was in love with him. The idea was the more agreeable to his self-esteem, inasmuch as he had arrived at that period of life at which men begin to entertain the mortifying suspicion that the season is fast drawing to a close in which they may hope to appear amiable in the eyes of the young and lovely.

Sometimes he made an effort to escape from the immediate spell of her fascinations by taking long and solitary rambles from home; but it was of no avail; he encountered her in his lonely walks, he met her in the streets of Woodfield,

and he even saw her at the chapel he attended, the last place in the world he had expected her to enter. Yet there she was every Sunday, looking lovelier than ever, directing her fatal glances towards him during the sermon, and mingling her sweet voice in the choral hymn to win his ear.

What could Barak Johnson do? His best, his only security, would have been to withdraw himself wholly and entirely from the dangerous proximity of his fair neighbour, but this would now have cost too painful a sacrifice.

Barak Johnson next grew jealous of the fair Phillis, and was miserable if he saw her speak to a younger man than himself; finally, he resolved to make acquaintance with her. This he did by offering her the protection of his arm and the shelter of his umbrella, one dark, rainy night, on their return from chapel. Phillis received these civilities very graciously, behaved demurely, listened with a show of attention to his observations on the sermon, and accepted his invitation to take tea and attend a prayer meeting at his house on the following evening.

It was to no purpose that Sarah Waters represented to the systematic coquette the impropriety and deceitfulness of her conduct. Phillis considered the impression which she had succeeded in making on the heart of her gloomy neighbour as a flattering proof of the

power of her charms, and she was determined on trying how far she could pursue her triumph. She even gave him hopes that she would become his wife, provided he would relax in some degree from the strictness of his practice in a few of the *non-essential points*, as he called them; and so great was the influence she had acquired over his mind, that with the view of rendering himself more acceptable to her, the stern sectarian first took one retrograde step and then another, from the heavenward bourne, till he found himself fast sinking into the vortex of those worldly follies and vanities which he had fondly believed he had renounced for ever.

On those evenings, before so strictly devoted to prayer-meetings, Phillis would beguile him into taking long lonely walks with her, or accompanying her on excursions to a neighbouring town to carry home work, which could not possibly be delayed, or to match some trimming or ribbon, which must be procured immediately; and Barak Johnson, though his conscience reproved him for his backslidings from the holy warfare he had commenced, could not deny himself the pleasure of her company, or suffer her to go unprotected on an evening expedition; far less could he brook the alternative, with which Phillis once threatened him, of permitting another to supply his place.

At length, not even his sabbaths were held

sacred, if Phillis proposed making that holy day, "her only day of rest and relaxation," she said, a day of pleasure.

Sarah Waters, who had vainly endeavoured to deter her sister from the cruel game she was pursuing, with the same wanton zest with which a cat amuses herself in sporting with the captive mouse, who feels his peril, but cannot escape from her fatal circle, one day asked her "if it were her serious intention to become the wife of Barak Johnson?"

"His wife, indeed!" echoed Phillis, contemptuously; "wed me to a skull and cross-bones, rather! I think I hear myself vowing to love and cherish that old monkish methodist, with his eternal texts, and prayer-meetings, and expoundings, which are enough to make any one melancholy mad."

"But," said Sarah, "you have induced him to withdraw himself from almost all his prayer-meetings, and even on Sundays to absent himself from his chapel very frequently."

"So much the better for him," said Phillis, laughing. "He spends his sabbaths now less like a Jew, and more like a Christian."

"Ah, Phillis, Phillis, it is a dangerous as well as a barbarous game you are playing. What your motives can have been for sedulously obtruding yourself on the attention of a man whose habits and manners are so uncongenial to your own,

and who, you must be aware, would never have bestowed a thought on you had you not thrown yourself perpetually in his way, I am at a loss to imagine."

"Well, then," returned Phillis, "if you must know, he provoked me, in the first instance, by his contemptuous looks and manners, and I resolved to punish him for his airs, and I hope to make him very miserable before I have done with him."

The remonstrances and sisterly advice of Sarah were unavailing to deter the reckless coquette from pursuing her wanton mischief. She accomplished her object only too fully, and not only did she succeed in rendering the proud and hitherto inaccessible heart of the stern fanatic the seat of anguish and disquiet, but in so doing she roused the tempestuous passions of his natural character, which had been for a time calmed and hushed to repose, by the powerful influence of religion, and now, like awakened giants, were in arms, and spreading desolation over his path.

Hitherto he had been like a strong man armed, but he had relied too much on his own security, and a stronger than he had entered and overcome him, and taken away his armour wherein he trusted.

He became too soon aware that he had surrendered his happiness into the keeping of a capricious tyrant, whose regard for him was of

a very doubtful nature. He strove to shake off her trammels, but in vain; the infatuation was too powerful. His peace on earth was gone, and the thoughts of heaven had ceased to be inviting; and now jealousy, bitter as death, was added to the tortures of uncertainty, and the pangs of self-upbraidings.

CHAPTER III.

A YOUNG watchmaker, named William Parry, came with his widowed mother to reside in the village, where he opened a pretty little shop and commenced business. As he was a young, handsome, and agreeable man, all the girls in Woodfield concluded he must be greatly in need of a wife, and began to lay siege to his heart by purchasing thimbles, earrings, and other female toys at his shop. Phillis, though possessed of a pair of gold pendants, that were the envy of all her compeers, found out that they were ugly and old-fashioned, and lost no time in exchanging them for a newer and handsomer pair from the assortment of jewellery in William Parry's glass-case. She was very difficult in her choice, and required the young

tradesman to put them in her pretty ears with his own hands. She would have been a customer to him for other things, but having expended all her savings, she was fain to break her father's watch-glass to procure another excuse for paying him a visit, and actually hampered the works of the clock, to make a job that would bring him to the house, at which he soon after became a constant visitor.

William Parry was a remarkably moral, well-conducted young man, possessed of more sense of refinement than was common in his station of life, and he was, in the first instance, more inclined to attach himself to Sarah than to Phillis Waters, whose levity and thirst for universal admiration he greatly disapproved; but then Sarah was five years older than himself, a disparity which Phillis magnified into double the number, and finally, by a series of wiles and witcheries, in which she was only too well versed, succeeded in inducing him to transfer his regards to herself.

No sooner was she secure of her conquest than she altered her manner to Barak Johnson, whose attentions were now not only displeasing but very inconvenient, as William Parry had expressed his disapprobation of coquetry, in very unequivocal terms.

The constant visits of William Parry at his neighbour's house enabled Barak Johnson to

account, only too well, for the change in the unstable being on whom he had anchored his affections, and he became the most wretched of men.

He opened his neglected Bible, in quest of that peace he had been wont to find in its sacred pages; but it was now to him as a sealed book, for a veil was upon his heart, and it breathed neither hope nor comfort to his benighted spirit. He sought the religious assemblies of his former friends, but they looked strangely upon him; he perceived that he was regarded as an apostate, and left them in anger.

He entered his accustomed place of worship, but it was rather to preserve appearances, with that world whose approbation had always been dearer to him than he was aware, than from any proper motives; for his thoughts were wandering, and his heart linked to an earthly idol.

He knelt down to pray in the solitude of his own chamber, but his lips uttered cold mechanical petitions, in which his spirit bore no part. He sought Phillis Waters; but he found her engaged with his rival, and she had neither eyes nor ears for any one beside. He sat with compressed lips and a lowering brow, sullenly watching her till he could bear it no longer, but rushed into his own house, to give vent to the paroxysms of rage and jealousy that shook his frame with stormy fury.

He was like a man seeking rest and finding none; and he had at length recourse to the fatal expedient of swallowing spirits as an anodyne to the inward agonies that consumed him—an anodyne to which, alas! too many under similar circumstances have applied, to escape from thought, but which, if it did afford the desired relief of oblivion to the sorrow that worketh death, was only a temporary alleviation, dearly purchased by the increase of morbid irritability which its after effects produced. In the case of Barak Johnson, the practice of dram-drinking was like pouring molten lead upon a recent wound, or introducing fire into his veins.

This practice of his was unknown to the world, unsuspected by his friends, for it was pursued in the loneliness of his chamber, and in the secrecy of his restless nights, as a means of procuring that sleep which had fled from his unquiet pillow; and while all wondered at the now uncontrollable violence of his temper, fierce explosions of passions, or long and sullen fits of gloomy despondency, no one dreamed of attributing it to the true cause—so generally were his scrupulous habits of abstemiousness known, and his character for temperance established.

“Barak Johnson,” said the minister of the religious society of which he was a member, as they were returning from chapel together

one Sunday afternoon—"Barak Johnson, you have been an altered man for the last twelve months, but thine idol, Barak Johnson, is about to be taken from thee."

Johnson endeavoured to dissemble the agitation and alarm which these words created; but though he kept silence, the natural language of his eyes asked the question from which his lips refrained.

"The bans of matrimony between William Parry and Phillis Waters were, I understand, published this morning," said the minister, significantly.

Fire flashed from the eyes of Johnson at this intelligence, and without uttering a single word in reply, he broke fiercely from his companion, rushed into his own house, near which this communication had been made, shut the door with violence, and locked it.

When the wildness of his first paroxysm of rage and grief had been vented, a long fit of deliberation followed, and after pacing the narrow limits of his little parlour for nearly an hour, a deceitful ray of hope broke through the darkness of his despair. He seized a pen, and wrote an impassioned note to Phillis, imploring her to see him once more. This note he sealed with a trembling hand, and despatched by his housekeeper.

After the delay of a few minutes she returned

with an answer. Barak Johnson snatched it eagerly from her. It was his own note, on the back of which Phillis had written the following words with a pencil :

“ As I shall in a few days become the wife of William Parry, I beg that you will consider our acquaintance at an end, and remain, with best wishes for your happiness,

“ Your humble servant,

“ PHILLIS WATERS.”

Johnson crushed the paper in a transport of indignation, and casting it upon the ground, trampled it under his feet, with an execration that perfectly electrified his housekeeper, who had never heard such expressions from his lips before.

Shè was preparing to address him either in the language of condolence or reproof, but he motioned her to begone with a gesture and look that terrified her into obedience; then, bowing his face upon his knees, he remained for hours in a stupor of despair.

From this gloomy pause of agony he was roused by hearing the voices of Phillis and her affianced bridegroom engaged in angry altercation.

They were in the garden, and Johnson presently discovered that the cause of the dispute originated in Phillis's wish to go to Scrapeton fair on the following day, which was disapproved by William

Parry, who positively refused to accompany her, alleging in excuse "that his aunt was at the point of death, and he neither could nor would leave her."

Phillis angrily replied,

"If you prefer your aunt's company to mine, you may please yourself; but *I* mean to go to the fair, whether you attend me or not."

A gleam of sullen satisfaction at the vexation of his favoured rival mingled itself with the fierce anger of Barak Johnson, as, after several wrathful rejoinders, Phillis and William parted for the night in mutual displeasure.

The following afternoon he saw Phillis issue from the house in her holiday attire, looking so lovely, that, in spite of resentful feeling and wronged affection, Barak Johnson could not refrain from gazing passionately upon her, as she paused at the wicket-gate, to speak to her sister, who had followed her thither, and laying her hand anxiously on the arm of the wayward beauty, exclaimed,

"Phillis! dear Phillis! do not go to the fair to-day. I have a strong foreboding that some evil will befall you if you do."

"Nonsense!" replied Phillis, shaking back the clustering ringlets from her fair face; "I mean to go I assure you. Cousin Sophy Cooper has invited me to a dance at her house, and there will be so many smart young men."

"What can that matter to you when you are about to become the wife of one whom, if you do not love, you ought to love, for he is fond enough of you?" said Sarah, in rather a tremulous voice.

"So you thought he was of you," rejoined Phillis, "yet you see you were mistaken."

"Who told you I thought so, Phillis?" said Sarah, with a varying colour. "I am sure such a thing never passed my lips."

"Oh, for the matter of that, folks are not blind," rejoined Phillis, pertly.

Sarah turned away and burst into a passion of tears, and Phillis, feeling a pang of remorse at the wanton cruelty of which she had been guilty, threw her arms about her, and begged forgiveness for what she had said.

"It is yours from my very heart," replied Sarah, wiping away her tears; "but indeed, Phillis, I cannot bear that you should go to Scrapeton fair this evening, neither do I think it right, situated as you are with William Parry."

"That is the very reason why I will go," said Phillis, laughing. "I dearly love to have my own way, and if I concede this point, I may be a tame household slave for the rest of my days, and might just as well marry the sour old methodist over the way."

This conversation passing so near Johnson's

open windows, he could not avoid overhearing every word: the contemptuous allusion to himself with which Phillis concluded, added a darker tinge to the evil passions she had wantonly awakened in his stern breast. She had disquieted his heart to its inmost depths, for her own amusement and the gratification of her insatiable vanity; but a tempest was gathering there, of whose terrific might she reeked not as she gaily pursued her way to Scrapeton fair, exulting in the conscious pride of her charms, anticipating fresh admirers there, and inwardly enjoying the idea of William Parry's mortification, when he should be informed of the fact that she had gone without him.

Though Barak Johnson had now seen and heard enough of Phillis Waters to have rendered any rational man thankful that he was not connected with her by indissoluble ties, he experienced an irresistible desire of ascertaining what would be the time and manner of her return. Urged by this fatal curiosity, and partly under the excitement of intoxication, he took the road to Scrapeton about ten o'clock, which he fancied would be the probable hour when she would be proceeding homeward.

CHAPTER IV.

THE way from Woodfield to the town of Scrapeton Parva lay through a long and lonely lane, overshadowed on one side by the woods of Borough Park, and on the other by a broken hawthorn-hedge, still white with the fading wreaths with which a smiling May had profusely decked it.

The fence skirted a pathway meadow called marlpit field, on account of a deep pit of water, out of which marl had formerly been carted in great quantities. This excavation was close to the roadside, from which it was guarded by a rough railing, being considered a dangerous place for two carriages to meet. Its steep sides had in the process of time become sloping, and were clothed with dark verdure, and overhung with alders, salallows, and other deciduous trees, now in full leaf, which rendered it a picturesque though gloomy spot.

And here Barak Johnson, after having thrice traversed the road from Woodfield to Scrapeton without encountering her whose proceedings he came thither to watch, paused, and reclining his gigantic frame against one of the old twisted salallows that grew on the edge of the pit, fixed his eyes wistfully on the still deep waters, that

darkly mirrored the shadowy outlines of his form so many fathoms below.

The moon was at her full, and the silvery blue of the horizon was gemmed with a few of the most radiant of the constellations, which alone were apparent through the splendour, the moonlight had diffused over the vault of night, and of these each star was shining distinctly visible, and differing from the others in its own particular glory, so as to illustrate the apostle's beautiful allusion.

That very passage, with all its solemn grandeur and holy promises, was indeed recalled, by the mysterious power of association, to the tempest-tost mind of the solitary lingerer, who stood with folded arms and thoughtful brow, in lonely communings, not with nature or with nature's God, but with his own perturbed spirit.

It was a night of summer-like beauty ; the breeze was laden with the perfume of the thousand flowers, on which the dew-drops glittered beneath the moonbeams. All was fresh, cool, and delicious abroad, breathing of rest and peace. Neither peace nor rest were in the soul of Barak Johnson. The nightingales sang from brake and bough around him, and were sweetly answered by their unseen partners in the deep recesses of Borough Wood ; but he heard them not. His ear, deaf to their thrilling notes, was strained with feverish

eagerness to catch the mingled sounds of mirth, intemperance, and boisterous riot that proceeded from the crowded town, or the nearer groups on their homeward return from the fair, breaking with foolish garrulity and unhallowed clamours the deep serenity of the night. Oh, how the sick heart loathes such sounds and maddens at their repeated recurrence! Barak Johnson listened for them, yet execrated them when they burst rudely upon his untuned ear, till he had worked himself up into a state of excitement bordering on frenzy. More than once he had measured, with a gloomy gaze, the depth of the pit before him, and murmured,

“Would not one plunge into this dark abyss release me from this weary strife, and should I not find repose from all my conflicts in these still, deep waters?”

He mused upon the question he had asked of his benighted soul, till the idea of a future state of existence began to grow doubtful to him—who had for so many years only lived on the hopes of that heaven for which he had renounced the joys of the world, the pleasures of sense, and the perishing things of the present time, accounting the trials, crosses, and sufferings of this life, as trifles not to be reckoned in comparison with the eternal weight of glory, that was to be revealed to the faithful, in another and a better world.

But it was an hour of darkness; the power of the tempter was upon him; and just as he was preparing to yield to the sinful impulse which prompted him to rush uncalled into the presence of his Creator, the sound of angry voices and approaching steps startled him from his desperate purpose.

The night was waning apace, the setting moon was shedding horizontal beams, and the faint indications of the approaching morrow had flickered the eastern heavens with gray and saffron streaks. A fresher breeze sprang up, but it cooled not the fever in Barak Johnson's blood; for the tones that now met his ear were such as appeared to wing a burning arrow through his brain—they were the familiar voices of Phillis Waters and William Parry.

The next moment convinced him they were engaged in an angry dispute; and as they turned the projection of an angle in the lane which had before concealed their approaching figures, he impulsively withdrew himself behind the shadow of an aged elm, to listen to their quarrel, the sequel, in fact, to that which had taken place in the garden on the preceding night; and William Parry said in reply to an angry speech from Phillis,

“Your sister never desires to go to such places, nor would anything induce her to mix in such company.”

To which Phillis sharply rejoined,

"If my sister suits your taste so much better than myself, it were a pity but you had her."

"Perhaps, now it is too late, I think so also," replied Parry, coolly.

"Nay, Mr. Parry, you are perfectly in time for any alteration. We are not yet married, I thank my stars; and it is well that I have discovered your temper while there is yet a remedy. I can assure you that if you are not weary of your engagement, I am; and if you presume to have our bans published a second time, I will stand up in the church and forbid them with my own lips," said Phillis disdainfully.

"Phillis Waters," returned the young man, "the bans of matrimony between us two have been published for the last time."

"Since you are so obliging in your compliance with my wishes in one instance, you will possibly be equally so in another, by ridding me of the present intrusion of your company," retorted Phillis, angrily.

"No, Phillis, I will not permit you to walk the rest of this lonely way unprotected on such a night as this," said William, firmly.

"I insist on your departing instantly. Your presence is odious to me—you only came to my cousin's for the pleasure of spoiling my enjoy-

ment, and preventing Ralph Dennis from walking home with me."

"And you, Phillis, would have preferred his company to mine," said William reproachfully.

"Aye, any one's, no matter whom. It would indeed be a hard matter to meet with any person whom I so thoroughly hated; and unless you immediately leave me, I will rid myself of your company by returning to the pleasant party from which you forced me in so unman-nerly a way."

"I will not suffer you to do so," said William. "It is already a very indecorous hour for you to be seen abroad, and whether you approve of it or not, I will conduct you in safety to your father's door, and there we part for ever."

The rejoinder made by the mortified beauty was of so aggravating and offensive a nature, that the young man, exasperated beyond all bearing, withdrew in great wrath, and walked hastily onward towards Woodfield.

"Perhaps you would prefer the company of the sour old methodist over the way?" said Barak Johnson, sternly, advancing from the place of his concealment the moment the last sound of the receding steps of William Parry had died away.

This address, and the suddenness of his appearance, startled Phillis into a half-scream, but instantly rallying her disordered spirits,

she said in her softest tone of deceitful sweetness,

“Who told you that I called you so, Mr. Johnson?”

“Your own lips, false, ungrateful woman!” he replied, and Phillis, recollecting, with dismay, that she had used that expression when talking with her sister in the garden, changed her manner, and in the true spirit of the aggressor, assuming an air of defiance, observed, “that listeners never heard any good of themselves, and those who took upon themselves so dishonourable an office, were welcome to whatever information they might obtain of the estimation in which they were held by their neighbours; and that for her part, she had long suspected him of being a secret enemy and spy upon her actions.”

“Oh, woman, woman! I have loved you only too well, either for my peace on earth or my hopes in heaven,” exclaimed Barak Johnson, with bitter vehemence. “I have reared idol altars to you in the secret tabernacles of my heart, on which I have offered to you that incense which was due to God alone. I have placed the creature of frail perishing clay, in rivalry with the Creator, and I have been requited with the wages of my folly. Very evilly hast thou dealt with me, Phillis Waters, for thou hast troubled the deep quiet of a soul which had been victorious over the strong temptations of youthful passions

and the mammon of unrighteousness ; and what, let me ask thee, hath my ruin profited thee ?”

Half angry, half frightened, at the vehemence of his manner, Phillis struggled to withdraw her arm from his grasp, as she replied,

“I am sorry you should have taken things so seriously, Mr. Johnson ; but you surely never could have supposed that I could mean to marry you !”

“What then was your meaning when for days, and weeks, and months you laboured so unweariedly to attract my attention to your fair but heartless self, to undermine my peace, and to lead me from my God ? for you desisted not till you had made me tenfold more a child of perdition than yourself. What had I done to you—how had I offended you—that you should have wrought me this woe ?” he passionately continued.

“You talk so strangely, I really don’t know how to answer you,” said Phillis, becoming seriously alarmed at the increasing violence of his manner.

“You cannot answer me—you dare not look me in the face, and you wish to escape from my reproaches ; but you cannot, you shall not escape me, Phillis Waters,” he fiercely replied.

“I will not be detained,” said Phillis, angrily ; “it is very late, and I am anxious to return

home; nor is it by taunts and reproachful language that you can oblige me to become your wife."

"My wife, Phillis Waters!" exclaimed Barak Johnson, with a bitter laugh. "Aye, once it was the hope and rapture of my life to fancy I should call you so. That time is past; that hope, like all things earthly, which divide our hearts from God, has proved a scorpion, which I—fool and madman that I was—nourished in my bosom till I felt it sting, and then essayed to pluck it forth in vain. I am a miserable, a very miserable man, a guilty man withal; but thou hast made me what I am; and what if the fires which thou hast kindled should consume thyself in their destroying fury? Thou hast sown the whirlwind, and it is meet that thou shouldst reap the storm."

Phillis trembled as, by the light of the waning moon, she marked the frightful working of his strong features, the fiery glow that overspread his countenance; and, above all, the expression in his blood-shot, glaring eye, as breaking forth once more into a laugh, half delirious, half fiendish, he exclaimed,

"My wife—ha! ha! ha!—my wife! No, Phillis Waters, thou wilt never be my wife, nor the wife of any other man."

"Then I must be content to die an old maid," she replied, with assumed levity of manner,

while her heart was sinking with unutterable dread.

He turned a glance upon her, fraught with a meaning that thrilled her with horror.

“You cannot, you dare not—you will not!” she exclaimed in terror, looking around on every side for aid in vain. His eye followed all the directions of hers, and sinking his harsh, loud voice to a hoarse whisper, he said,

“Thou seest all is loneliness, Phillis Waters! Thou art in my power, abandoned alike of God and man.”

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She struggled with frantic violence, but her slight frame was in the grasp of a giant. His murderous gripe was on her throat, and the half-breathed cry died away on her convulsed lips. Her unnerved fingers relaxed their desperate hold from his arm, and her head sank back, a powerless and heavy weight upon his bosom.

The setting moon had withdrawn her beams from the scene of horror, but the gray twilight of early morn was sufficient to reveal to the murderer the fearful change that had taken place in the countenance of his victim. The strife, the agony, the bitterness of parting life were past, but had left their traces written in legible characters on her blackened and distorted features, now

fixed in the silence and awful immobility of death.

The tears still hung in large and heavy drops on her cheeks and long shadowy eyelashes, her fair ringlets, which had escaped from the confinement of her bonnet in her mortal struggles, fell in disordered but beautiful profusion over her face and bosom. They alone were unchanged, and their exquisite loveliness afforded a singular contrast to the agonising expression of the convulsed lips, and expanded eyes, whose glaring orbs were cast upward in the suffocating pangs of parting life.

The sound of approaching footsteps prevented Barak Johnson from pausing to contemplate his work. To conceal the deed was his immediate object; and for this the deep marl-pit, near which he had perpetrated it, afforded a present facility; raising the graceful and still warm form, that now reclined a helpless weight across one knee, in his nervous arms, he heaved it over the rough railing into the gulf beneath.

Gloomily he watched its descent as it sunk, with a sullen plunge, into the bosom of the dark deep waters, but ere the temporary agitation in the stagnant pool could subside into its former waveless calm, a cautious step on the gravel near him startled the murderer; turning about in terror he perceived a man, almost at his elbow, who said,

“No accident, I hope, was the occasion of that great splash?”

One glance relieved the guilty Barak of the apprehension of immediate detection, for he perceived that the eyes of him who had, in all probability, been a witness of the deed were sightless. It was, in fact, a blind beggar returning from the fair at Scrapeton.

To have remained perfectly silent under such circumstances would have been Barak Johnson's best security; but it is common for the guilty, in their excess of caution, to overshoot the mark, and he, judging it necessary to account for the plunge, replied,

“It was only one of the rails against which I was leaning just now gave way, and fell into the water.”

“You must have thrown it in, and that with violence, to occasion such a plunge; but I could have sworn it had been produced by the fall of a heavier body than one of these rails,” observed the blind man.

“How should you know the weight of these rails, since you cannot see them?” demanded Johnson, angrily, his natural irascibility getting the better of his caution.

“Doth it require the aid of sight to enable a man to judge of tangible objects?” said the beggar, running his stick along the railing as he spoke.

"Have a care of what you are about, my good fellow, or you will fall into the pit yourself," said Johnson, somewhat alarmed at this action.

"No fear of that, master," returned the blind man; "the rails are all firm in their places, and not one lacking. It needs not the witness of the eyes to detect a falsehood."

Convinced that his crime, though unseen, was not unsuspected, Barak Johnson fled in terror from the spot, taking a circuitous path that led over the fields towards Woodfield.

CHAPTER V.

SARAH WATERS, meantime, had kept weary vigils that night, anxiously watching for the return of her thoughtless sister. After midnight was passed, her father, who had been sitting up with her till that hour, said "he was persuaded Phillis would sleep at the house of her cousin," and went to bed.

Sarah felt no such conviction; she knew that William Parry had, notwithstanding his displeasure, gone to the fair, at nine that evening, with the intention of inducing Phillis to return home at a decent hour. That he had failed to

do so was evident; but she was assured that nothing would have tempted him to remain out all night, and had Phillis obstinately persisted in so doing, he would certainly have called to inform her of her sister's intention, therefore she still continued to expect her return, though at what time she knew not.

Hour after hour passed away, and Phillis came not. Sarah grew weary of her needle, put away her work, and took up a book; but the subject was dry and heavy, and finding it difficult to confine her attention to its pages, she threw it down, and softly unclosing the glass door that opened into the little garden, she went to the wicket-gate to listen. All was silent in the village, and the only house in which she saw a light was that of William Parry's mother, by which sign she knew that he was not yet returned. The church clock struck two while she stood at the gate, and marvelling at the protracted absence of the pair, she re-entered the house, snuffed her candle, resumed her book, and once more endeavoured to occupy herself in its pages.

The attempt produced irresistible drowsiness, and she dropped asleep with the volume in her hand. Her slumber was heavy, but not refreshing; confused images of horror were present to her sleeping fancy, and she awoke with a sudden start, chilly, and with a mysterious

feeling of dread on her mind. She found herself in profound darkness too, for the candle had burned out while she slept. Her heart throbbed fearfully for a moment, but presently recovering her self-possession she unclosed the shutter of the glass door, and felt reassured on perceiving that it was already morning. Anxious thoughts of her sister renewed her uneasiness. She went once more to the wicket and saw the candle in Mrs. Parry's chamber still dimly burning in the gray light of dawn. Feeling convinced that some distressing cause must have occasioned the protracted absence of both parties, she resolved to put on her bonnet and shawl, and walk a little way on the road leading to Scrapeton.

In the entrance of the marl-pit lane she encountered William Parry alone, and in much disorder.

"Where is Phillis?" she demanded in surprise.

"Ask me no questions," he replied, in an agitated tone, "Phillis and I have parted for ever."

"Indeed!" said Sarah, starting; "but where have you left her?"

"Just by the marl-pit," returned he.

"Then I shall meet her in the course of a few minutes."

"Yes, unless she went back to the fair after I left her."

"But why did you leave her, William? Surely, under any circumstances, it was unkind to do so on such a night as this," said Sarah.

"Indeed, I remained till she aggravated me beyond all powers of endurance; but I was wrong to leave her, and I will walk back with you, Sarah, till we meet her, if you will take my arm."

"I shall be thankful for your protection, William, but I would rather not take your arm," said Sarah, and they walked in silence and apart till they reached the marl-pit.

"It was just before we came to this spot that we parted," observed William; "therefore it is plain that she must have gone back to the fair, or we should have met her long ere this."

"Inconsiderate girl!" cried Sarah, "I fear it is as you say, and as I am already so far on the road, I am determined to proceed to Scrapeton, and endeavour to prevail upon her to return with me."

William Parry assented to the propriety of so doing, and continued to attend Sarah; but they walked as before, in silence, for both were engaged in a train of painful reflections, and their manners were mutually distant and constrained.

The clocks were striking four when they entered Scrapeton, which presented a revolting picture of the demoralizing effect of fairs on the lower

classes of society. A scene which might indeed have excited a smile from a humorist, but could scarcely have been witnessed by a Christian without horror.

Some of the revellers were still up when William and Sarah arrived at the house of Sophy Cooper, for the little dwelling could not afford beds for a tenth part of the dissipated young people who had assembled there on the preceding evening.

The appearance of Sarah, and the return of William, at an hour so extraordinary, excited great surprise, and some little speculation, among the company; but when they proceeded to inquire if Phillis were not there, all present uttered an exclamation of wonder, and one of the young women replied in a tone of peculiar pertness,

"Surely, Mr. Parry, *you* ought to be able to give the best account of her, since she left the house under your protection, and we all considered it a mighty ungentle action of yours to come and break up our pleasant party, by quarrelling with her in the way you did, and forcing her away quite against her will."

"And," said another, "we all agreed that it was but a poor sample of what pretty Phillis Waters might expect as your wife, since you began to treat her in that sort of masterly fashion beforehand."

William Parry, without paying the slightest

attention to these remarks, replied to Sarah's looks of consternation by snatching up his hat, and proceeding in quest of Phillis; but he could not learn that she had been seen by any one since she left the town in his company. He was now seriously alarmed, and his countenance betrayed that he was so, when he returned to Sarah, after a long and of course fruitless search for her absent sister.

The remembrance of the foreboding that some evil consequences would result from Phillis's visit to the fair, which had haunted her on the preceding day, recurred to Sarah's mind, and she felt as if that dark presentiment had been already fulfilled. She experienced a sensation of sick and dizzy faintness, the effects of a sleepless night, combined with agitation and anxious alarm.

When, however, she looked around her, she perceived that the tawdry over-dressed groups among whom she was seated, presented countenances even paler and more haggard than her own; for they had been wearied out with a day and night of restless riot, miscalled *pleasure*, in which they had undergone more bodily fatigue and exhaustion of spirit than if they had been labouring at the treadmill.

With some of these the reaction of past excitement betrayed itself in the restless movements and twitching of their limbs, and

almost hysterical paroxysms of yawning. Some were leaning their aching heads on tables still covered with the unseemly remnants of their late feast. Others had fallen asleep in chairs, or even on the ground; while a few, with whom the maddening passion of gambling prevailed over the weakness of the flesh, continued to play at cards, and to bet on the chances of the game, with as much vehemence as if it were their only business on earth, and the sole purpose for which they had been called into existence.

Sarah contemplated this scene, in which her sister had been so recently engaged, with feelings of sickening horror. The very atmosphere of the house seemed, to her, pollution; nor did she appear to draw her breath freely till she was far on the road to Woodfield with William Parry.

They both experienced an uneasy sensation when they passed the marl-pit. William, because it was near this spot he had parted with Phillis; and Sarah, whose nerves were totally unstrung, from the gloomy appearance of the deep, dark waters, and the sombre shade of the dank foliage with which its sides were overhung.

This impression they mutually confessed to each other when they arrived at Woodfield, and learned that Phillis had neither been seen nor heard of there; and William, when he

parted from Sarah at her little garden-gate, went so far as to say "that he would not rest till he had caused the pit to be searched, for he felt a strong conviction that some evil had befallen Phillis on that spot."

He then went home to speak to his mother, who had, he feared, been uneasy on account of his absence during the whole night, but he assured Sarah that he would return immediately, to assist in a further search for Phillis.

CHAPTER VI.

BARAK JOHNSON, meantime, had been a trembling observer of all that passed in his neighbour's house, having returned to his own at an early hour. About seven o'clock, he saw the arrival of Sarah and William after their unsuccessful search for Phillis, and was convinced by their pale countenances, and looks of consternation and perplexity, that both had taken the alarm on account of her absence; but when he heard William Parry express his intention of searching the pit, he was filled with apprehension lest the discovery of her fate should attach suspicions of her murder upon himself. Under the influence of these terrors he began to ponder on the

expediency of removing the body of his victim to some secret spot in Borough Woods, and burying it there. But then he reflected that there would be greater danger of detection in carrying such a project into execution, than in letting it remain where it was.

"For," thought he, "the waters are dark and muddy, and the pit very deep and cavernous, and Parry will only make a cursory examination of the place, having no just reason to conclude that Phillis has actually been murdered. Might not her absence be accounted for under the more probable supposition that she had eloped with one of the officers of a regiment lately quartered in Scrapeton and its vicinity?" He actually felt angry with William Parry for not suggesting such a suspicion.

That thought did indeed cross Sarah's mind; but she had all along been impressed with a foreboding that something fatal had befallen her sister from her ill-starred visit to the fair, and now that presentiment appeared to her as verified.

Barak Johnson felt a strong inclination to say that he had seen Phillis in a postchaise with an officer, at an early hour, on the London road that morning; but then he feared to incur suspicion, by acknowledging that he had seen her at all. Next, he debated on sending a letter to her father as from a gentleman who had taken

her into keeping ; but this plan, like the other, was objectionable and fraught with danger, and before he could resolve on any scheme for removing from the minds of Phillis's friends the impression that she had been murdered, his deliberations were interrupted by the tumultuous tread and busy murmurs of an approaching multitude.

He ascended to his chamber-window, which commanded a view of the cross-roads at the entrance of Woodfield, and beheld a vast concourse of people advancing towards the village, from the direction of the marl-pit lane. His colour went and came, and his heart died within him, as the apprehension occurred to his mind, that the body of his victim had already been discovered ; but then he endeavoured to reassure his fluttered spirits by the thought, that these were some of the numerous visitors to the yesterday's fair, who had spent the night in the town, and were now returning in company to their respective houses. Yet, as the crowd drew nearer and nearer, he was convinced, both from their numbers, the vehemence of their gestures, and the loud and earnest manner in which they were discussing some subject of apparently great excitement to all parties, that something more than ordinary had occasioned the gathering together of such a throng, which momentarily increased ; for he perceived that

people from all quarters ran eagerly to join themselves to the moving mass.

Guilt is always apprehensive, and when Barak Johnson observed the demeanour of the people, and saw them enter Woodfield, his breath grew short, and his knees smote each other with an audible sound ; what then were his feelings, when he plainly perceived that six men in the centre of the crowd bore on their shoulders, extended on a gate, which had been taken from its hinges to form a temporary bier, a form which, though shrouded beneath a large cloak, too plainly displayed the outlines and proportions of a female figure to be mistaken for any other object ; while the rigid stiffness of its attitude, and its motionless composure, denoted, no less than the solemnity of the steps of the bearers, and the grief, horror, and wonder depicted on the countenances of the attendant multitude, that it was a corpse — the corpse of a murdered person.

And as it passed beneath his window, Barak Johnson recognised, with speechless dismay, the long fair ringlets of Phillis Waters, some of which had escaped from beneath the cloak that covered her lifeless form, and hung dripping over the shoulders of one of the men who assisted in carrying her cold remains.

There was a general murmur, then a sudden hush and breathless silence among the dense

crowd, as the melancholy group stopped before her father's house, and the rude bier was carried slowly and cautiously within the little wicket-gate, through which she had so lately passed with light and buoyant steps, full of health, life, and loveliness, in all the pride of conscious beauty, attired in gala array. Poor Phillis, her cold, cold form was still clothed in the trappings of earthly vanity, though wet and discoloured by the dank, green waters from which she had just been drawn. Her cornelian necklace and brooch, long gold pendants, and glittering waist-buckle, might have afforded a moral lesson on the folly of unsuitable adornments to the young and thoughtless of her own sex, who place an undue importance on the acquisition of such baubles, and too often procure them by means in direct violation of the law of God.

These, together with the money in her purse, remaining untouched, afforded a convincing proof that no common ruffian had perpetrated the murder, else those articles of value would have been abstracted. Barak Johnson heard, with a faltering heart, this inference proclaimed by every voice in the crowd beneath his window, and expected momentarily to hear himself denounced as the probable murderer. But when he saw the father and sister of his victim approaching to look upon the face of their dead,

his feelings overpowered him. A cold thrill of horror ran through his veins, he became sick and faint, the chilly drops of agony rose on his shuddering flesh, the light forsook his eyes, and he sank down in a swoon, yet not so deep as to render him wholly insensible to what was passing beneath.

The name of Phillis Waters still rang on his ear, mingled with words that were sometimes partially, sometimes wholly indistinct, like a confused, buzzing murmur, of which he strove in vain to catch the meaning, though his corporeal powers were suspended, and his gigantic frame reclined at its full length in lifeless immobility.

A fearful consciousness of the peril of his situation was present with him, which appeared to suggest the necessity of shaking off the torpor that enthralled him, when a loud abrupt knocking at his door, startling him with such terrors as guilt alone can experience, broke upon his fainting ear. Its immediate effect was to rouse him from his swoon, not by gradual progressive recovery, but with a sudden impetus, which instantaneously restored suspended animation; for he sprang at once upon his feet, and demanded in a loud, stern voice, the business of the intruder.

It was a summons to form one of the coroner's jury, then assembling to hold an inquest on the body of Phillis Waters.

"Horror upon horror," thought Barak Johnson; "all is horror!"

Yet even in this distressing summons there was matter for self-congratulation, since his being nominated to such an office afforded an indubitable proof that no shadow of suspicion had attached itself to him, and when he reflected how much his own security would be ensured by his accepting it, he resolved at once to do so in the hope of escaping the dreadful penalty of the crime he had committed, and armed himself with a front of iron, to go through the worse than fiery ordeal that awaited him.

CHAPTER VII.

It required a heart as well as a front of iron, for Barak Johnson to unite with the rest of the jurors in examining the corpse of his victim. Nor could imagination conceive any torture more agonizing than that of being called upon to look, with unshrinking firmness, on the pale and distorted features, fixed in the rigidity of their death convulsion, by the coldness of the waters into which he had plunged her—of the woman whom he had so madly loved, so barbarously murdered.

The morbid irritability occasioned by the repeated draughts of raw liquor he had swallowed, in the course of the preceding day, which had had the fatal effect of aggravating, to a paroxysm approaching to frenzy, the passion into which he had worked himself up during his last interview with the unfortunate girl, had subsided; and, while he remembered how bitterly she had pleaded for her life, the blackened marks of his murderous and relentless grasp on her fair throat—that throat whose graceful contour might have afforded a model for the chisel of a Baily—stared accusingly upon him, and seemed to upbraid him with the deed. Yet he forced himself to examine these minutely, and to affect calmness, as he joined with his fellow-jurors in reasoning on his own barbarous work, while his heart beat thick and fearfully with secret apprehension, lest the evidence to which his attention was called should prove such as to point the suspicions of the crime to himself, more particularly as he beheld among the witnesses the blind beggar with whom he had held the brief conference, already recorded, beside the marl-pit.

It was, he learned, in consequence of this person's depositions that the pit had been searched, and the body of the murdered girl discovered.

The heartstricken father, and the pale, tear-

ful sister of his victim, were present also, having been summoned in the first bitterness of their overwhelming calamity to identify the body of Phillis, and to render their testimony as to the time and circumstances of her going to the fair, in returning from which a fate so dreadful had overtaken her.

There too was William Parry, whose situation was more distressing than theirs, more critical than his own; for he had been dragged from the deathbed of his expiring aunt, and brought thither on suspicion of being the murderer of Phillis Waters. A mass of the most extraordinary circumstantial evidence that ever deceived a jury, pointed against him. He was the last person with whom the deceased had been seen. High words had passed between them on the evening previous to the murder, and on the night of the fair, at the house of her cousin, from which, after an angry altercation, he had used the authority of an affianced husband in withdrawing her, and she had never been seen after she quitted the town of Scrapeton in his company.

Sophy Cooper and her friends had been highly offended at the undisguised contempt he had expressed of the pursuits in which he found them engaged, and now they had a dreadful opportunity of gratifying their vindictive feelings in return. The evidence they gave of his conduct on that

eventful evening was such as left little doubt on the minds of the coroner, and eleven of the jury, that he was guilty of the crime with which he was charged.

The young man with whom Phillis was dancing when William Parry entered the room, went so far as to depose, "that he had observed to Sophy Cooper and the rest of the *ladies*, that he did not consider it was safe for Phillis to go with William Parry in the humour he then was ; for his looks, manner, and the tones of his voice were furious, and indicative of malice."

There was not only exaggeration, but absolute falsehood in this statement ; nevertheless, it was corroborated by the evidence of Sophy Cooper and her companions, and it made a great impression against the prisoner.

William Parry and Sarah were alike startled at the unexpected but strong tide of evidence which appeared to attach the suspicion of the crime to him. Sarah's inward persuasion of his innocence availed nothing ; for her own testimony of having met him alone, and in a great state of excitement, in the marl-pit lane, at a time so completely corresponding with that at which the murder must have been committed, contributed more powerfully to corroborate the mass of evidence against him than anything beside. It even had its weight with herself ; for as the appalling coincidence struck her, she smote her

hands together, and turning suddenly to the prisoner, exclaimed, "Oh! William, William, have you indeed done this?"

"No, Sarah, believe it not!" he replied, in a firm voice; "and if I die for it, my innocent blood will be on the head of the murderer, and will add to his condemnation in that dreadful day when the secrets of all hearts will be revealed."

One circumstance was in Parry's favour. The blind witness was positive in his opinion that he was not the person with whom he held parley by the side of the fatal pit; and when asked the reason for his conclusion, he replied,

"The voice is different."

"May not your ear deceive you sometimes?" asked the coroner.

"It never did yet," returned the blind man; "and I tell you to a certainty, that the prisoner is not the person with whom I talked by the marl-pit. The prisoner passed me on the road from Scrapeton. He was talking to a young woman. They were quarrelling. It appeared to be a lover's quarrel, and she was very aggravating in her speech; but they outwalked me, for I am slow and careful in my steps, being blind, as you see. Soon after, I heard a woman's voice in distress. I thought it must be the same, and quickened my pace; but just before I reached the spot whence it proceeded, I heard a great

splash, and knew by the sound that it was the plunge of a human body into deep water."

"How came you to know such a sound so well as to form that conclusion?" asked the coroner.

"Because," replied the witness, "I had once a sister who fell over a high bank into a mill-stream, and was drowned, no one being near her but myself, who could not give her aid; and I shall never forget my feelings, when, in the midst of my darkness, I heard that plunge. It must now be near forty years ago, but it has never been absent from mine ear, and how could I be deceived when I heard again a sound like that? The murderer told me a rail had fallen into the water, but I knew it was false, even before I tried the railing with my staff, and found it all firm and fast. His voice was peculiar—it was harsh and loud, with a north-country bur-r, like a border-man. That of the prisoner is clear and pleasant, and he speaks singingly, like all the people about here; by which you may know a Suffolk person all over the world. I have travelled England through, over and over, and if forty people were present from forty different counties, I could tell you every man's county by his speech, unless they were the high-bred gentry who go to London schools, and get mocked out of their native tongues till no one knows who they be or where they come from."

A cold perspiration had bedewed Barak Johnson's forehead during the examination of the blind witness, whose accurate description of his voice caused every nerve in his gigantic frame to vibrate with a cold thrill of terror; but so strong was the prejudice on the minds of his fellow-jurors, that William Parry was the murderer of Phillis Waters, that they declared themselves unanimous in that opinion, and directed Johnson, their foreman, to pronounce the verdict of "Wilful Murder," against the unfortunate young man.

For a moment Barak Johnson recoiled with horror at the idea of suffering an innocent person to pay the dreadful penalty of his guilt. He demanded five minutes for consideration, and obtained a pause of additional agony, while he struggled between the witness of conscience, and the power of evil, in his benighted soul. But here temptation assailed the gloomy fanatic in one of its subtlest forms.

"Have I not," he mentally said, "broken the law of God too deeply already to increase my own damnation by any additional act of guilt, to which self-preservation may now reluctantly compel me? I am abandoned of God, given up to mine own reprobate mind, as a vessel of wrath, formed and fitted for destruction, and if I perish, I perish—for it must needs have been so."

Thus communed the unhappy man with himself; and while, with strange self-delusion, he excused his crimes by denying the existence of free will, he exercised it by resisting the strivings of conscience, and making himself the instrument of those who, acting in ignorance, formed their judgment according to outward appearances, when, as foreman of the coroner's jury, he stood forth, and with his own lips pronounced the verdict of "Wilful Murder against William Parry."

At the sound of the first syllable uttered by Barak Johnson, the blind witness started, and turned his sightless orbs upon his face, with a look that alarmed the conscious murderer with the idea that those large expressive eyes recognised him, through the thick darkness that clouded their visual powers. The inward principle of the immaterial mind, to which the sense of sight is a subservient organ, did indeed struggle to penetrate the film by which the exercise of its outward faculties was impeded and prevented from corroborating the evidence of the ear, whose quick impulse it mysteriously but vainly obeyed, and before the verdict was fully pronounced, he exclaimed aloud,

"The voice! the voice!"

"Whose?—whose?" was the eager query of the excited spectators.

The blind witness laid his stick on the arm

of the foreman of the jury, and briefly and impressively replied,

“Behold the man!”

“The hand of the Lord is against me!” exclaimed Barak Johnson, and fainted.

Witnesses then appeared, to testify against him circumstances, before unregarded, but now that suspicion was pointed at him, assuming a fearful importance.

He had been seen lingering in the marl-pit lane, near the spot where the murder was committed, at various times that evening, by different people, to whom he was well known. Then there was the certainty that his bed had not been slept in that night, and he had been seen to return to his house at a very early hour in the morning. Lastly, some of the long fair hair of Phillis Waters was found entangled among the metal buttons of the coat, he had worn on that day, which had evidently been rent away during the desperate but ineffectual struggles of the unhappy girl, and remained there, unobserved by the murderer, to afford conclusive evidence of his crime.

Barak Johnson was fully committed for trial for the murder, and finally suffered the awful sentence of the law. He acknowledged his guilt, and the train of circumstances which had led to it, but he sullenly intrenched himself behind the Antinomian doctrine of his creed,

when urged to repentance of the crime, by declaring "that he had acted under the impulse of immutable destiny, and had done nothing but what had been decreed for him from the beginning of time; for his had been a lost soul, before its entrance upon its earthly pilgrimage."

Some months after these melancholy events, William Parry became the husband of Sarah Waters, with whom he enjoyed that calm domestic happiness, which no reasonable person could have expected to taste, as the husband of her beautiful but heartless sister.

V.

JOHN WITTON AND THE CUNNING
WOMAN.

ILLUSTRATIVE OF A SUPERSTITION IN THE EASTERN COUNTIES.

WILL it be credited, that, in this scientific age, within a hundred miles of London, the lower orders of people in the eastern counties of England believe that the ague (which is commonly very prevalent in flat, marshy districts, during wet seasons) proceeds from no other cause than the malicious vagaries of a certain moist fiend, a sort of *ignis fatuus*, said to haunt the fens and lowland pastures, where he lies in wait for all such luckless wights as may be unwary enough to enter his demesnes after sunset? Sometimes, not content with such stray game, this terrible imp bestrides a vapour, or sails forth on a fog wreath, and takes a wider range for prey through the hamlets, villages, or scattered cottages further afield, where he, generally speaking, selects his first victims from the children who incautiously sit

on green banks in the deceitful sunshine of March, or sleep on the wet grass after showers.

These are small beginnings, but in no respect to be despised; "for once let the ague-fiend enter the house," say those *time-honoured* sages, the oldest inhabitants of the place, "and you know not when it will be possible to get him out again; since it hath been observed, from time immemorial, that the very day, aye, the very hour and minute, that he leaves one member of a family, he attacks another; and, generally speaking, goes his rounds through them all without favour or exception."

In fact, the ignorant sufferers from the ague will not be dissuaded from the idea that this distressing intermittent fever is something of a demoniacal possession. Two centuries ago this belief was not confined to the uneducated class alone; for that learned and minute antiquary, Anthony-à-Wood, relates, in sober seriousness, and with pathetic quaintness, a circumstantial account of the manner in which himself and a fellow student at Oxford were afflicted by the ague, and the various schemes they practised to rid themselves of its noxious influence; but all in vain, one being no sooner freed from it than it attacked the other, till the shrewd old farmer in whose house they had hired "a convenient upper chamber, with the

accommodation of a fair shelf on which to lay their books," informed them "that they knew not how to deal with the ague, which was not to be driven out by means of medicine like an ordinary fever, since it was of a nature wholly different."

Old Anthony gravely proceeds to state "how he and his fellow-student, in compliance with the said farmer's advice, rowed down a running stream, and when they were in the middle leaped from the boat on to the bridge, and from the bridge to the land, flinging the bridge, which consisted of a single plank, back to the opposite shore, so speedily effecting the manœuvres withal, that they fairly left the ague in the lurch, since it could by no means pass over the running water unless by the aid of the bridge, but was sure to attack the next person that attempted to enter the boat, no matter whom." Anthony-à-Wood and his chum were released from its spell, and returned cheerfully to their chambers at Oxford, and the old farmer, though he lost his lodgers, exulted in his sagacity in outwitting the ague.

Almost precisely similar to this quaint relation of the learned chronicler, as far as regards the popular superstition of Oxfordshire, was the account which an old ploughman, who worked on my father's estate some years ago, gave of the manner in which he and his master got rid of

the ague, after it had held them for more than two years, resisting alike medicines, charms, and every device they could imagine to expel it.

“For sartainly,” quoth old John Witton, “this was a special arguing fever”—let none of the learned professions take offence; these were his veritable words—“one of the most subtlest to deal with I ever met with in all my days. As true as I’m alive, he neither minded pepper and gin taken fasting on a Friday morning, nor blackbottle spiders made into pills with fresh butter, nor agrimony tea; and as for doctors’ stuff, it was all meat and drink to him; for the more of it I took the worse I got.

“Then I went to old Betty Snowling, the cunning woman, who lived in my young time, just fifty summers ago, at the north end of the pathway pightle, and sometimes went up to the hall, when old my-lord Marlivale was out of the way, and the young my-ladies chose to have their fortunes told unbeknown to him; and so I said to her, ‘Mrs. Snowling,’ says I, for I thought it were best to be civil, and not call her Old Bet, ‘what am I to do to get rid of this argee, which has almost shaken all my teeth down my throat?’

“ ‘Why, narbor Witton,’ quo’ she, ‘to-night’s the full o’ the moon, and if you’ll give me a shilling and a groat, and a farthing for luck, I’ll chalk up a cross in my chimbley-back for you,

and the argee will waste away as the moon wanes, and you'll be free from it by this day fortnight.' 'Narbor,' says I, 'that's a long time to wait; I'll give you a crown if so be that you'll send it away to-night.' 'Give us hold of the crown,' says she, 'and I'll put you up to a scheme.'

"So I hauls out my money, and sorely vexed were I to part with it so lightly; but if it had been ten times the size, and sterling gold, I would have given it to get rid of this arguing fever. So then Betty Snowling went to a corner cupboard, and took out her box of charms, as she called them, and she gave me one of them, which looked as much like a tenpenny nail as ever I saw a thing in my life; howsomever, it had more virtue in it than that could have, as you shall hear.

" 'When do you expect the fit?' says she.

" 'At six o'clock to-morrow morning, please God,' says I.

" 'Then,' says she, 'go to the four crossways to-night, all alone; and just as the clock strikes twelve, turn yourself about three times, and drive that nail into the ground up to the head, and walk away from the place backwards, before the clock is done striking, and you'll miss the argee; but the next person who passes over the nail will take it in your stead.'

"Sorely glad was I to hear that; and if it had

been my own father that was to pass over the nail, I shouldn't have stopped for that, so as I got rid of the argee. When the clock struck eleven, and all decent people were abed and asleep, except my mistress, who was sitting up for master, who was out at a fair, I began to feel a little queerish or so, as if this argee would come on afore the time with the thought of what I had to do; however, I reached down my hat as soon as the hands pointed to the half hour, that I might be in time.

“‘Where are you going?’ axed my mistress.

“‘To drive a tenpenny nail in the crossways, to cure the argee,’ says I.

“‘Umptious! very umptious!’ says she, holding up her hands; ‘oh, Johnny, Johnny, I’m afraid you’ve been dealing with old Betty Snowling, who witched my dear little Sammy with an evil eye, and bespoke his death when he was as fine a boy as ever smiled on a mother, and before the week was out he was shrouded and cooffined, and laid in the churchyard.’

“And then she would fain have told me the whole long story of master Sammy’s sickness, and death, and *fineral*, with the names of the children who carried him to the grave, what they and the upper bearers wore, what it cost for their hat bands and gloves, and the bows of beautiful white love ribbon they had pinned on their left breasts, and the mourners who

followed him; but, thinks I, 'if I stay to hear all that, which I have heerd her tell more than fifty times afore, I shall lose the nick of time to drive the nail into the four crossways, and have another fit of the argee.' So as soon as mistress put her apron to her eyes, which she always did when she talked of master Sammy, I slipped out of the kitchen, and ran, without stopping, through the hoss-yard, to the crossways, and all the time I *consated* that I were dodged by two black imps, that properly scared me.

"Well, when I came to the crossways, at the end of Calve's lane, going on to the common, there I stood and heaved for breath, for I had run very fast; and then I thought the place looked mighty lonesome, and I began to wonder whether any body were ever buried there, for being *necessary* to their own death, as 'twas four crossways, and our mistress had talked of its being umptious to drive a tenpenny nail there. And for sartain the nail must have belonged to the devil, as it came out of Betty Snowling's box of charms. And what, thought I (as I took it out of my pocket, that it might be all ready against the clock began to strike), if it should turn red hot and burn my fingers? I would fain have flung it over my left shoulder to be rid of it, if I had not bought it at such a dear rate; and I shook

every joint of me as much as if it had been the hour for the argee, when the church clock began to strike twelve.

“There was no time to be lost then, if I meant to get rid of the argee that night; so I began to turn myself round, and had turned three times before the third stroke of the clock had sounded, then down I went upon all-fours to hammer the tenpenny nail into the earth with a great stone; but I hadn’t a ha’porth of strength left in my blessed buones, and my hand shook like an aspen leaf.

“Dang, dang, dang, dang, dang, dang!—went the old clock, six strokes, before I had fitted the nail to the ground, and the stone to the head of the nail; dang, dang, went the clock again; knick, knock, went the stone on the head of the nail; dang went the clock again; knack, knack, went the stone; it was well the ground was soft, or I never should have *druv* it into the earth, for I were all the same as a one-year-old babby, and any one might ha’ knocked me down with a straw.

“Dang went the old clock again, eleven strokes; my heart was up in my throat. Skra-a-ah, shrieked the grey owl in the witch-elm over my head; I thought it were Old Harry himself, and Betty Snowling laughing at me for a fool, and that riled me; so down went the stone and drove the nail in smack up to the head. Just

as the twelfth stroke was beginning to ring in my ear, I was up and off like a whirligig, and bounced into mistress's kitchen before her clock, that was five minutes slow, had done striking.

"But whether I went backwards or forwards from the crossways, after I had knocked in the nail, I never could tell, so properly scared were I at the thought of the devil and Betty Snowling. But for sartain I was more afraid of the argee than either, or I never dared have done such an umptious thing, as mistress said. Howsomever, I shall remember to my dying day the pint of humming harvest beer she had heated over the fire for me against I came in, and put such a glass of gin into it, with a grate of nutmeg, a toast of bread and a dip of treacle, that it comforted and warmed my very heart, and does me good to think of it now.

"Well, ten minutes after, in comes master, looking as blue as a harvest-plum, and he sits down by the fire, and he creeps closer to it and closer, and says, 'It's kinder *cuelish* to-night, mistress,' and presently his teeth fall to chattering, and he begins to *dudder* all over; and to *ga-pe*. Thinks I to myself, but I said nothing, you may be sure, 'As sure as a gun, master, you're in for my argee-fit, for you're the first man that have passed over the tenpenny nail;' and sure enough I was right, for I missed the fit what I should ha' had at six o'clock in

the morning, and master took it, and had the argee sixteen weeks from that time.

“My mistress always told him ‘it was all along of his staying out so late at the fair,’ but I knew it came of his crossing over the nail. As ill luck would have it, Teddy Todd, the turnip-boy, and Charlie Cobb, the cow-boy, were avised of that too, for them curious young toads had *snaked* arter me, as I found out in a little time, ’cause they had taken it into their two fools’ heads that I were going to try a love charm, and they wanted to get a little information about them sort of things, and crape sliely out of our backhouse door to watch me, crawling on hands and knees arter me, as I went through the hoss-yard to the crossways, little for-thinking the real business I were upon, till they saw me turning myself thrice, which made every hair stand on end on their heads, for fear the argee-fiend should lay hold on them. Be sure they *snaked* home, and took care not to go over the tenpenny nail.

“Master hisself went to Betty Snowling to hear of a cure, and she told him ‘to cut nine notches in the cross-bar of a stile before sunrise the morning he expected the fit, and the next person who crossed over that stile should take in the argee instead of him.’

“Master did as he was told, and said nothing about it to nobody; and who should be the

unlucky body to cross the stile that morning first but I my own self! and as true as I am alive, I was argee-ridden again as bad again as ever; and the worst of it was, the fit took me every night, so that I could not get down to the four crossways to drive in the tenpenny nail at the proper time, to witch the arguing fever to somebody else.

“So away I went at last to Betty Snowling once more, and directly she looked me in my face she told me I had got the argee again, and had come to her for a charm.

“‘But,’ said the hungry witch, ‘it’s of no use coming to me without money in hand.’

“So I showed her all the money I had left, which was two shillings and sevenpence ha’penny, and said I, ‘Mrs. Snowling, you would fare harder than a Jew if you took all a poor young *feller* have in his pocket, for another charm, which don’t cost you anything. Sure you might *full* me back a shilling for charity.’

“‘Then,’ she said, ‘Johnny, I must leave you enough to pay the hangman, I suppose,’ and with that she took the sixpence and one of the shillings, and left me just thirteenspence ha’penny; and sixpence out of that I gave her on the spot for her to tell my fortune, that I might know what she meant about the hangman. And then she told me that it was all a joke.

Well, sir, she gave me a string off the handle of her broom, and told me to knot nine withered crab-apples upon it, and then leave them in a pathway field, across the path, an hour before I expected the fit, and that happened to be an hour before sunset. So I did as she told me; and who should be the first person to cross the field but master, and he got the argee again as bad as before.

“Then, when he saw as how I missed the fit that night, he jealoused that there was something of a plot in the business; and so says he to me, ‘Johnny, my man, you and I must part, for I see we have got the arguing fever betwixt and between us, and we shall have no luck while we two have a being in the same house.’

“‘Sure, master,’ says I, ‘and if we are argee-ridden, we may shift the argee away by some scheme or other, so as to outwit the owd fiend.’* ”

* Many of the charms ignorantly used by the East Anglian peasantry, as cures for the ague, are evidently relics of the sacrificial rites offered to the powers of darkness by the pagan Saxons and Danes.

In one district of Suffolk, I have heard of the following superstitious practice. A man who had been labouring under an obstinate ague for several months, purchased a new red earthen pan, in which he put the parings of his finger and toe nails, together with a lock of hair, and a small piece of raw beef, which, in order to render the charm effectual, he considered it necessary to steal. He then tied a piece of black silk over the pan, and buried it in the centre of a wood in ground that had never be-

“‘Ah! Johnny,’ says he, ‘I have had enough of your schemes of shifting of the argee, that’s for sartain; for I never should have had it this year at all, if you hadn’t a-driven that tenpenny nail in the path that you knew I must take in coming home from the fair that night, when you witched your fit upon me.’

“Then I knew by that saying of his that them tiresome toads, Teddy, the turnip-boy, and Charlie, the cow-boy, who I had been forced to flog for some of their tricks, had ’venged upon me by telling about my acting that ’ere charm with the tenpenny nail, for I had made out that they were the black imps what had dodged me down to the four crossways, at the end of Calve’s Lane, ’cause they couldn’t keep their own secret, but told Molly, the maid, and she told every body else, so that I got properly mocked and mobbed about it at Scrapeton market, when I took mistress’s butter down to shop.

“‘True as I’m alive, sir,’ says I to master, ‘I had not a thought of you, sir,’ says I, the tears coming into my eyes at the thought of losing my good place, with just only sevenpence ha’penny in my pocket to pay for quarters at

fore been broken, in the firm belief that, as the meat decayed, his fever would abate, and finally disappear. A grosser oblation to the evil spirit would scarcely have been offered by one of the heathen inhabitants of central Africa.

one of the cottages, which war'n't enow. 'And, besides, sir,' says I, 'I'm letten to you till next Michaelmas, and that was for better or worse you know, so you can't get rid of me afore that time without you've anything to say against my character, but that's what I defy you to say; for though "I says it as shouldn't say it," as the saying is, there isn't a steadier honest, or soberer young fellow than I is—saving the arguing-fever, which is no fault of mine, for I never was given to stay out late at fairs and such likes.'

"'Ah, Johnny,' says my mistress, 'that's the way people gets argees, and colds, and rhumatis, and then their poor wives have to nurse them.'

"'And then,' says I, 'sir, 'twasn't I that directed your crossing over the tenpenny nail, for 'twas all a game of hap-hazard who should be the first to pass over it; and now, after all, master, if there had been anything in that, it would have been the *hoss* that would have had the argee; since it were he, poor dumb *critter*, that passed over the nail, and not you.'

"'Johnny, Johnny,' said master, shaking his head, 'that won't do; hosses arn't liken to Christians, and never do take the arguing-fever; and though I don't blame your trying a scheme to shift away the argee, yet I do think you might have charmed it away into the next

parish, or, at any rate, not driven your nail in my path.'

" 'Well, master,' says I, 'you never takes into account your notchin' the stile, that I had to pass over into the bean-field, so as I got the argee back again.'

" 'Why, Johnny,' says master, 'that was my loss in a double sort of way, d'ye see; for, in the first place, I lost your services just in the haysill and turnip-hoeing time, and in the next you brought the argee back into the house, and managed so as to fling it on me.'

" 'Then,' says my mistress, 'you see all the good that comes of such umptious doings as dealing with the devil and Betty Snowling.'

" While we were 'bating the matter over, comes up to the house old Joe Spilling, the cow-leech, from Brainsford Wood, and master says to him, 'I'll give you a crown, Joe, if you can put me up to a scheme for getting rid of the argee clear out of the house.'

" Now Joe was a cunning old fellow, who had more know in him than any person for ten parishes round. He could tame the most resty horse in my lord's stables, and make the most ugliest tempered cow in the county give down her milk to the dairy-maid, even the very night the butcher took away her calf. He could charm away warts, cure corns, and burn people in the ear for the toothache, bleed both cattle and

Christians, set a psalm and make the reponses at church better than the old clerk, Nehemiah, who always followed Joe's readings, and never shamed to skip the hard words that Joe could not make out; for he thought if Joe Spilling could not make them out, it were hardly to be expected that he should.

"Then Joe wrote and read valentines and love-letters for the men and maids, far and near, and had given away most of the brides married in his parish, and stood godfather to the children.

"Ah! Joe was a special fellow; and everybody used to say nothing was too hard for him to manage, if he once set his mind upon it. My lord Marlivale, who was always an awful man about the game, was forced to wink at all Joe's poaching jobs, because he was such a famous hand at breaking his young dogs. Old Betty Snowling and Joe were sworn enemies, because two of a trade never agree; and it was said by some that Joe dealt not a little in her way of life; only I don't think there could have been so much sin in Joe's conjuring, or he never would have been such a constant church-goer; and folks do say that old Betty durst not go into a church for the life of her, leastwise not in time of sarvice.

"So when master asked Joe about getting rid of the argee, Joe put his finger to the side of his

nose and winked three times, and said, 'You have been dealing with Betty Snowling, both of you.'

" 'Ah, Joey, you're a cunning chap,' says master, 'but that's not the question; I want to be advised into getting the arguing-fever clean out of the house.'

" 'Well, master Tibman,' says Joe, turning the crown between his finger and thumb, 'if you only depend on Bet Snowling's charms and devilries, you'll never get rid of it at all, for she witches it from one on purpose to send it back to t'other; so you might go on till doom's-day at a game of see-saw. Now, if you'll be ruled by me, you shall carry it not only out of the house, but clean out of the parish; so come along with me, both of you.'

"Off we all set, leading master between us, for the foul fiend of the argee was still ruling him; but for all that Joe made him keep up a brisk pace till we came to a little running brook that parted the parish from Scrapeton parish, and by that time master was all in a heat. There was a plank laid over the brook by way of a bridge, and we all ran across it, and stopped in Scrapeton parish till the fit was quite off master. Then Joe gave him a sup out of a bottle that he had in his pocket to keep up his spirits, and we all came back to our own parish side, only master was last man, and we bounded one after the other from the plank to the shore, and flung

back the plank after us to the opposite bank, and there the argee was forced to bide till the next person passed that way, for it could by no means cross running water unless by means of bridge or boat; so we got fairly rid of the arguing-fever; and what is more, neither master nor I ever had it again from that day to this."

"Well, John," said my father, "and did you ever find out who was the next person to cross the brook?"

"True as I'm alive, sir," replied John Witton, with a knowing grin, "that was the best of the joke, for it was old Betty Snowling herself, coming home in the dusk from telling the old squire's young wife's fortune; but, witch as she was, she could not tell her own, for she knew no'r'n of the bridge being flung back, and she set her foot where the plank used to be, and plumped right into the brook over head and ears, and for a sartain would have been drowned; only, that being a witch she could not sink, but floated over to the other side, and brought the argee back to our town. With all her charms she could not cure herself, but had it thirty weeks every day of her life, and was fain to go to the parish doctor at last, to be cured, for she was too proud to go to old Joe Spilling for a cure; no, no, she'd rather have been shook *buone* from *buone* than have gone to him for a cure."

"But did the parish doctor make a cure of her?" demanded my father.

"Well, sir, that's more than I can tell," replied John, "for I heard of a service that Michaelmas, at higher wage, in this here parish, and left our country, and married like all the rest of the fools, because I met with a pretty girl, and here have I lived ever since, so what became of old Betty Snowling and the arguing-fever I never heard from that day to this."

VI.

ST. VALENTINE'S DAY ; OR, THE POSTMASTER OUTWITTED.

CHAPTER I.

NOTHING contributed more to preserve the various links of society in friendly union, than the observance of those periodical festivals of the seasons wherein all classes delighted to join, actuated by a sort of sympathetic feeling, which, like the sensation communicated by the touch of the electrical chain, was experienced by every member of the circle, at the same moment, however widely extended.

There was a time—and who can doubt of its being a time of mirth and good-fellowship?—when, not only the apprentices and serving-maids of London went out “a maying,” but the king and the great lords of his court rose with the lark to honour the same sylvan custom, and rode forth into the green forest in a jovial train; and it is especially recorded that the king’s grace returned home merrily to breakfast, with

the first gathered sprig of the May blossoms in his cap, amidst the acclamations of his loyal lieges.*

There is also an item among the household expenses of the Princess Mary, the eldest daughter of the same monarch, afterwards a queen-regnant of England, of forty shillings paid to George Mountejoie, for drawing her to be his Valentine.†

But, alas, for the nineteenth century! we may well exclaim with Sir Walter Scott—

“Old times are fled, old manners gone.”

May-day is only remembered by the chimney-sweepers; and even from these sooty votaries of Flora, its delights are almost wrested. The joyous festivals of Christmas and Easter are styled, by many of the inhabitants of this land, “rags of Popery;” and as for that once delightful and eagerly anticipated day, the anniversary of sweet St. Valentine, it is shorn of all its glories. The frigid etiquettes of modern society have stamped its observance with the brand of vulgarity. This sometime Cupid and Apollo of the British Kalendar, has been not only banished from courts and palaces, but rudely expelled from all the haunts of fashion and gentility,

* See Ellis's “Royal Letters,” First Series.

† *Ibid*, “Household Expenses of the Lady Mary.”

and driven into kitchens, cottages, and villages, far remote from the great metropolis.

Alas! most amiable St. Valentine, jewel of bishops, and patron of unfledged poets and youthful lovers, I cannot allow thine anniversary to pass without giving a sigh to the agreeable reminiscences of the period, when thine was a day of days in our village, teeming with pleasant fancies and sportive missives. When timid lovers availed themselves of the license of the season to pen, and actually to post, amatory verses to the expecting objects of their *penchant*; when friends and cousins sent pretty gifts mysteriously to their especial favourites, hoping all the while that the recipient parties would have a shrewd guess as to the good fairy from whom the token came; and if a maliciously written copy of gibing rhymes, penned by some slighted lover or jealous rival, did occasionally find its way into the village letter-box, it was only like one of the sharp thorns which are always to be met with in a close vicinity to roses—a drop of verjuice infused among gallons of honey—and people of sense were never annoyed by a Valentine pasquinade.

Those were the days when servant-maids rose up betimes, each in the hope that the first man on whom she cast her eye might prove the favoured bachelor whom she was

desirous of claiming for her Valentine. If it chanced that any damsel who had once been greeted with the accustomed salutation of "Good-morrow, Valentine," by one swain, was afterwards addressed in the same manner by another, she was bound by the custom of the day to reply, "You are sun-burned!" implying, thereby, a reproach on his laggard wooing, since, according to the primitive fashion, a true Valentine should be in attendance beneath his lady's lattice by peep of dawn, to prevent the possibility of being fore-stalled by a more adventurous gallant.

What time each swain with anxious care,
His hours from sleep would borrow;
In hopes the first to greet his Fair,
With "Valentine, Good-morrow!"

Who, till she heard him, looked not out,
For fear she should discover,
Some loitering and unwelcome lout
And not her favoured lover.

And youths and maids, with puzzled brains,
Were to each other writing;
In amatory doggrel strains,
Of Cupid's own inditing.

And duly with their tender rhymes,
They sent some true-love token;
Which practice of the good old times
Is now despised and broken.

For in these modern days we see
Each custom scorned and slighted;
Of ancient sweet simplicity,
In which our sires delighted.

Instead of annual loving lays,
From untaught minstrels flowing;
In which the chosen lady's praise,
Through every line was glowing;

The loaded postmen now dispense
Epistles most perplexing;
Ill-written in foot-foundered verse,
Malicious, dull, and vexing.

With double postage saddled, too,
To make the joke the better;
From distant towns a witless crew
Send many a huge blank letter.

At sight of which, each tongue inclines
To cry with angry racket,
"How could you, on St. Valentine's,
Take in that foolish packet?"

Formerly, the maidens of the household could scarcely sleep on the vigil of St. Valentine, for thinking of queer-shaped little billet-doux, edged with latticed margins, and fringes of daintily cut paper, embellished with rudely-executed devices, scrawled in pen and ink, designed for representations of hearts, darts, true-love knots, and wedding-rings, surrounding the quaint doggrel rhymes, which, from time immemorial, have been considered by the East-Anglian peasantry, as

the most orthodox form of words in which to address their Valentines.

Great was the search that was instituted on the morning of this eventful day, by charmers of low degree, for these tender missives, which were sometimes found mysteriously pushed under doors, or dexterously insinuated through casement crevices, as cunningly as if Queen Mab herself had been the agent employed. But the pleasing excitement of "Valentine-tide," as the twelve auspicious days between new and old St. Valentine's anniversary are called in the East of England, was by no means confined to belles in humble life. Fifty years ago, every damsel in her teens, from the daughter of the squire to the dairy maid, expected to receive some anonymous tribute to her charms, in rhyme, either from her known or unknown admirers, at that felicitous season; and young ladies watched for the advent of the postman with fluttering hearts. Stern fathers and prudent mammas were also on the alert, to prevent effusions, from unqualified enamoratees, from finding their way into the hands of the young people.

Valentines, even when penned with classic taste, elegant and chastely pure, having always been regarded in the light of contraband articles by the higher powers, however welcome they might be to the youthful members of a family; like other prohibited articles, they were often smuggled

into houses, where the most jealous precautions had been used to prevent their admission. I speak of ordinary cases; but the heroine of my present tale was peculiarly situated with regard to such matters. Poor Jessy Willingham was an object of commiseration to all the other village belles. She was the step-daughter of Mr. Samuel Spry, the postmaster of Woodfield. Nothing could be more mortifying to a pretty girl than to live at the post-office, the very focus of this pleasing excitement, and to witness, annually, the arrival and distribution of so many gratifying billet-doux to others, and never to receive one herself. It was not that Valentines were not addressed to her as well as to her compeers, but then they unluckily had to pass through her step-father's post-office, and he, having interested reasons for keeping her single, never allowed anything of the kind to reach her, always making a point of sorting the letters himself at Valentine-tide, though at other times he deputed that office to his wife.

The reason for Mr. Spry's conduct was obvious enough. Jessy was entitled to a few hundred pounds when she came of age; but if she died in her minority, without heirs, then the property was to be wholly at her mother's disposal.

Jessy Willingham was tall and slender, with a complexion transparently fair, but somewhat pale which gave such a delicacy to her appearance,

that Mr. Spry made up his mind that the fortunate contingency, for him, of her early death would certainly occur. Jessy, however, was far enough from the verge of the grave—the fragility of her figure was the result of her having outgrown her strength, and her paleness was occasioned by her habit of nocturnal novel reading.

Mr. Spry kept a stationer's shop, to which was annexed a circulating library, and Jessy passed all her time in the study of its contents. No wonder the bloom of youth yielded to the languor, occasioned by sickly excitement, which Mr. Spry regarded as symptomatic of a consumptive tendency. When he had once made up his mind to that conclusion, he ceased to interdict his fair step-daughter from lending her assistance in the shop, on market days, and other busy times. Her mother, who was apprehensive lest the cold currents of air in the shop should have a bad effect on her daughter's health, would fain have confined her to her snug little parlour; but Mr. Spry ridiculed the idea of encouraging the girl in nervous fancies; and Jessy, truth to tell, preferred the liveliness of the cold fireless shop to the warm comforts of the dull little parlour behind it, which reminded her of one of the dungeons in her favourite romances.

Mr. Spry's business became unusually brisk, from the time Jessy Willingham took her station behind the counter where the ornamental goods

were displayed for sale. She was quite in her element when presiding over the annuals, pocket-books, and poems ; and the lawyers' clerks, apothecaries' assistants, and agricultural beaux of the district, found it difficult to resist her recommendations of these tempting small-wares of literature, which, however lightly they may be regarded in the metropolis, are held in peculiar esteem in a country village, and viewed with longing looks by those who cannot afford to become purchasers.

Jessy Willingham, happy girl, was deeply read in the contents of every publication of the kind that graced her step-father's shop windows or counters, and she discoursed of their respective merits in eloquent terms, to every one who entered the shop. More than one spruce young bachelor in the neighbourhood came there, not to choose annuals, but to talk to the fair Jessy about choosing them. Very interesting were the conversations that sometimes took place, on these occasions, between Jessy and young Baldwin Maplestone, eldest son of Lord Marlivale's rich steward ; but it was all in the way of business, or Mr. Samuel Spry would never have permitted it.

Baldwin Maplestone was a great customer, but he never would make any purchases when Jessy was not in the shop. "It was very odd," Mr. Samuel Spry said, "that Mr. Baldwin

Maplestone, who was so free of his orders to that girl, would never buy anything of him, no, not so much as a stick of sealing-wax, or a penny pencil. He" (Mr. Samuel Spry) "was afraid there was something going on between them, and yet he never had left them alone together—no, not for one moment—and, what was more, he never would."

CHAPTER II.

It was in vain that Baldwin Maplestone, who was greatly taken with the "White Rose of Woodfield," as Jessy Willingham was called, exercised all his ingenuity to obtain a private interview with her. Nothing could procure the absence of the wily stationer from the shop. Jessy was never to be seen any where else, except at church, and there she was placed between Mr. and Mrs. Spry, and had no opportunity of looking either to right or left.

The heiress of England was not more carefully guarded from the approaches of unauthorised lovers, than the fair step-daughter of the postmaster of Woodfield.

Baldwin Maplestone presently understood the politics of Mr. Samuel Spry; but the difficulty

was, how to outwit him, and to make Jessy acquainted with the state of his affections; for Jessy was a girl of timid retiring manners, though not wholly unconscious of the interest she had excited in his heart.

Baldwin was aware that if he wrote to her, his letters would fall into the clutches of the surly dragon, her step-father, who generally sat behind a green curtain that parted off the little nook, where the letter-box was fixed, from the rest of the shop, and examined every letter that dropped through the official aperture, with the most critical attention. If he found one addressed to Miss Jessy Willingham, and did not approve of its appearance, he relentlessly returned it, through the dead-letter office, to the luckless writer.

Jessy, mild and gentle as she was in mind and manners, was highly indignant at this despotic exercise of authority—usurped authority, as she justly considered it—on the part of her tyrannical step-father. “It was very hard,” she thought, “that she, who had always entertained such an earnest desire to enjoy the delights of a tender correspondence, should have entered into her twentieth year, almost past the age of sentiment, without having tasted the rapture of reading one of the many letters that had been addressed to her.”

She told Betty, the sympathising maid of all

work, "that if she knew when the next letter that was written to her was likely to be posted, she would try to get possession of it."

"Then, Miss," replied Betty, "you may be certain sure, there will be one or two letters for you next St. Valentine's, for that is the day when all true lovers do write to their dears."

Jessy, though she made no rejoinder to this remark, well remembered that Baldwin Maplestone, the last time he came into the shop, had made purchase of a pocket-book, with an almanac in it, and had, moreover, opened it, and pointed, with a significant glance, to the fourteenth of February, and asked her "if she knew what day it was;" but the intrusive approach of Mr. Samuel Spry prevented further explanation.

"I think I now understand young Mr. Maplestone's meaning. He intends to send me a Valentine this year; but what will be the use of putting himself to that trouble, when my step-father will insult him by returning it to him, through the dead-letter office, without allowing me so much as to look at the superscription?" sighed poor Jessy.

On St. Valentine's morning, Jessy rose at an unprecedently early hour, with the intention of making a private inquisition into the contents of the letter-box, and if she found any missive there, directed to herself, to secure it; but, as if aware of her design, Mr. Samuel Spry had

also quitted his chamber, and tracking her steps, strode into the post-office before her, and relentlessly chucked three most attractive-looking letters, one written on pink paper and sealed with a Cupid, which she felt assured were intended for her, into the bag appropriated for the reception of rejected letters.

"If those letters were directed to me," said Jessy, "I am prepared to pay the postage, and I wish to have them delivered to me."

"I dare say you do, Miss," responded the postmaster; "but I cannot permit anything so improper to fall into your hands, while you are under my care."

"How do you know they *are* improper?" demanded Jessy, impatiently.

"They have the appearance of Valentines," said her step-father.

"Oh, dear, and I did so wish for a Valentine! Pray, do let me read them."

"Not for the world, Jessy; and I consider you are a very bold girl to wish to look at such folly," said Mr. Spry, locking the dead-letter office bag as he spoke, and pocketing the key.

Jessy was highly provoked; but her anger was of no avail, though she continued to argue the point with her step-father till it was time to open the shop windows. She then enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing Baldwin Maplestone in his new green riding frock, white corduroys, and

superfine beaver, mounted on his sorrel hunter, ride gallantly into the village.

"He is my Valentine this year, at all events," whispered Jessy to herself, "for he is the first man I have seen this morning." Her pleasure was further increased when young Maplestone reined up his horse before the shop, and greeted her with the accustomed salutation of the day, "Good-morrow, Valentine!"

Jessy blushed, smiled, and looked remarkably foolish, but very well pleased.

"It would be but courteous of you, Miss Jessy, to say 'Good-morrow, Valentine!' again I think," said the steward's son, "after all the pains I have taken to be the first to claim you."

"Are you quite sure that you are not sun-burned, Mr. Baldwin?" asked the maiden.

"Positive! seeing that I, like a true Valentine, mounted my sorrel steed by peep of day, and have ridden up the street and down the street, till I saw the shop opened, and you—waiting to be my Valentine!"

"How do you know that I did not peep behind my window curtain before I came down stairs?" asked Jessy, with a spice of coquetry, that was not quite in accordance with the sentimental softness of her character; but St. Valentine's day has always coquettish influences on village *belles*.

"If you did, it must have been for the pleasure of looking at me, my sweet Valentine, for there was no other man in the street," responded Baldwin Maplestone.

"Jessy, I am ashamed of the levity of your behaviour," interposed Mr. Spry, "go into the parlour to your sewing."

"So I will, when you have given me my three letters, sir," replied Jessy, with unwonted spirit, emboldened, perhaps, by the presence of young Maplestone, and the tribute he had just rendered to the power of her charms.

"Three letters!" exclaimed the steward's son, springing from his horse and entering the shop. "I only sent you one, Miss Willingham, and I should like to know from whom the others came."

"So should I," replied Jessy, demurely; "and if you can persuade my step-father to give them to me, perhaps I may satisfy your curiosity as well as my own."

"I do not wish you to receive Valentines from any one but me, Jessy."

"Will you ask Mr. Spry to give me that which you say you sent me, then?" said Jessy, looking down and blushing.

"He shall give it you," said the young man, resolutely.

"Shall he?" cried Mr. Samuel Spry, with a sneer.

"Sir," said young Maplestone, "I will write a complaint of your proceedings, through another post-office, to Sir Francis Freeling."

"And I will write, in explanation, that a wild young fellow had the impudence to write to my daughter one of those farragoes of nonsense, called a Valentine, and posted it in my office, and that I exercised the authority of a father, in withholding it from her, on the grounds of impropriety."

"When you really possess the authority of a father, I may, perhaps, submit to your decisions, sir," observed Jessy.

"And when I address any communication of an improper nature to that young lady, whom you call '*your* daughter,' then may I consider you justified in withholding it from her," said Baldwin, "but I affirm that my letter to her was prudent, tender, and respectful; and to convince Miss Willingham that I speak the truth, I beg leave to submit this paper, which is a true copy of the same, to her perusal."

He offered an unsealed letter to Jessy, with a low bow, as he concluded; and Jessy, in spite of the peremptory orders of Mr. Samuel Spry, to the contrary, smilingly received and eagerly perused the only love verses she had ever had the pleasure of seeing addressed to herself. They were far more interesting to her than they would prove, I doubt, to the general reader, for Valentine

poetry is not among the most choice of our national lyrics.

It is not every man who pens a Valentine enjoys the satisfaction of knowing, much less seeing, how welcome it is to the recipient party. Baldwin Maplestone well merited the pleasure of meeting the glance of tender meaning with which Jessy Willingham looked her reply to the acknowledgment of his affection.

"Well, Jessy, what do you say to my Valentine?" asked he.

"That I hope, one day, to be allowed to make a proper answer to it," replied Jessy; "but at present, you are aware that I have not the power of pleasing myself."

"It is not fit you should, Miss," observed the angry postmaster, "or we should have you throw yourself away on the first artful fellow who wants to make a fool of you, because he hears you are likely to have more money than wit."

"Sir, I defy your insinuation," replied Baldwin Maplestone; "your step-daughter's fortune is not my inducement in wishing to obtain her for my wife. My father is ready to meet her mother on that subject any day Mrs. Spry may be pleased to appoint. The sooner the better, I say; hey, Jessy?"

"I am quite of your opinion, Mr. Baldwin Maplestone," cried the damsel's mother, darting

from behind the door that opened from the little back parlour into the shop.

"My dear Mrs. S., to be sure you are not going to make a fool of yourself!" interposed the postmaster.

"No, my love; one in a house is enough, I think," rejoined Mrs. Spry, significantly; "and I hope I know better than to look off such a match for my daughter as Mr. Baldwin here, if so be that his honour, old Mr. Maplestone, does not object."

"My father has no other wish than for my happiness," replied Baldwin.

"I shall feel it my duty to wait upon him, and inform him of your proceedings, young man," said Mr. Spry.

"Pray, my dear, don't make yourself so ridiculous as to interfere with things that do not concern you," exclaimed Mrs. Spry; "Jessy is my girl; and if any one is to wait upon Mr. Maplestone about her affairs, sure it ought to be her mother and guardian, namely, myself."

"But, Mrs. S., I have something to say on the subject."

"No matter, if you have," rejoined his better half; "mind your own business."

"Oh, that that sentence were written in letters of gold on the market-cross of Woodfield," said Baldwin Maplestone, laughing. "I hope, madam,

the wisdom of your counsel will not be lost on Mr. Spry."

"Ah, my dear Mr. Baldwin, if Mr. S. would but attend to my advice!" responded the matron, with an admonitory glance at her spouse, whom she never ventured to henpeck, except when emboldened by the presence of an ally.

Mrs. Spry's importance was greatly increased in the eyes of all her neighbours that afternoon, by the advent of Mr. Maplestone, senior, whose visit lasted two hours and a half, by Woodfield church-clock, as many a Woodfield busy-body testified to their astonished gossips, in the back street. The fact was also recorded, that Mr. Samuel Spry was actually excluded from his own back parlour, while the parties concerned were arranging the preliminaries for the marriage of my lord's rich steward's son, Mr. Baldwin, with Miss Jessie Willingham.

During that interval, the discomfited postmaster paced his shop in an agony of fuss, disobliged every customer who claimed his attention; and behaved in the most offensive manner to all the village turtles who came to pre-pay the responses to Valentine billets. Nay, he even forgot the nature of his position so far as to invoke sundry maledictions on the new postage bill, which had so greatly increased his official toils. In the domestic circle, he pre-

served a sullen silence and lowering brow for the residue of the day.

When he and Mrs. Spry retired to their chamber, the exulting matron poured into his reluctant ear the important secret that "her Jessy and Mr. Baldwin Maplestone were to be married in six weeks, with the full consent of Mr. Maplestone, senior."

The only rejoinder Mr. Samuel Spry thought proper to make to this announcement was, that, in his opinion, the anniversary of St. Valentine ought to be called "All Fools'-day."

VII.

DORCAS AND PETER PIPER, THE VILLAGE VALENTINES.

CHAPTER I.

OUR old parish-clerk and sexton—these offices are always united in a country village—was the greatest match-maker in the district, Heaven rest his soul ! It was, in sooth, his interest to nurse up all love affairs to a matrimonial conclusion, on account of the fees which fell to his share, in his official capacity, for his assistance in the performance of the marriage-service.

Nehemiah Dowton was an ancient bachelor, who, for the honour of the church of which he considered himself a dignitary, avoided all occasion of scandal, by dispensing with the services of a housekeeper, and performing all the domestic offices for himself ; by which means he contrived to maintain an unsullied reputation, and to preserve inviolate such of the secrets of the parishioners as were confided to his keeping.

In short, Nehemiah was a sort of Protestant Father Lawrence, whom any rustic Juliet among the lambs of his flock might visit and employ in the most delicate affairs with perfect safety.

In the commencement of the present century the art of penmanship was almost unknown among our East Anglian peasantry, and the parish-clerk was usually employed in strict confidence, as Valentine reader and writer, by the unlettered lovers of the village.

Nehemiah's memory was well stored with the most approved valentine-verses and their variations. An original valentine in those days was a thing of rare appearance, and when received, was, perhaps, scarcely so well understood or relished as the old-established formula which had descended from generation to generation.

Great were the cogitations and consultations between Nehemiah and his clients, if it happened that the latter were desirous of the alteration, or interpolation of a couplet or quatrain, in one of these standard valentines, in order to make it bear upon some peculiar circumstances or personal feeling. When this was the case, Nehemiah, being slow of study in the art of poetry, generally requested three weeks' or a month's notice to prepare his brief, for which, moreover, he always expected a double fee.

One moonlight night in January, our rosy dairy-maid Dorcas, after bringing home her

flowing pails, and setting out the milk in the red earthenware bowls with which the dairy shelves were neatly ranged, went forth a second time, and made a temporary elopement across the fields and byways to the residence of old Nehemiah, in order to seek his counsel and assistance in a matter that required the most anxious consideration.

Poor Dorcas had been in very low spirits for the last three months. She had ceased to sing pastoral ditties at milking-time, or to move her dairy scrubbing-brush with her wonted vivacity; she had eaten no plum-pudding on Christmas-day, moped during the merry-makings of New-Year's Eve, and refused to have anything to do with drawing king and queen, or any other of the maskings and mumblings practised in the servants-hall, on old Christmas-night, or the feast of the kings. Dorcas was a person of a secretive disposition, and therefore did not choose to relieve her mind by talking of her disquiet; yet it was pretty generally whispered, "that she was crossed in love; for 'her young man,'" as she called Peter Fenn, farmer Drake's horse-driver—in Suffolk, ploughman are always styled *hoss*-drivers—"had not been to see her for more than twelve Sundays past; so no doubt Peter kept company with Hannah Brown, Mrs. Drake's cook and dairy-maid, which, as she was his partner, was kind of to be expected, and was more convenient

for Peter than walking across so many fields and pightles after Dorcas."

These insinuations had had the effect of saddening all the festivities of that jocund season, and, indeed, of rendering everything of the kind intolerable to the mortified damsel. It was to no purpose that the other female servants strove to comfort her. Dorcas was sullen and froward with every one in the house, "She did not wish to be pitied," she said: "and begged them to mind their own business, and not trouble themselves about her affairs."

Furthermore, Dorcas forbade any one to mention the faithless Peter's name in her hearing again, by which prudent step she escaped the mortification of some malicious condolences, and of listening to many aggravating reports of his attentions to her rival. But though her feminine pride, and the reserve natural to her character, induced Dorcas to carry matters off with so much independence, the pent-up grief pressed heavily at her heart, and, after brooding over the subject for some weeks, she suddenly took the resolution of proceeding to our wise man of the parish, Nehemiah, and craving his assistance in carrying her project into execution.

Nehemiah was sitting alone at his old oaken table, with an hour-glass before him, spectacles on nose, reading, for the thousandth time, Sternhold and Hopkins's version of the Psalms

when he was interrupted by the appearance of this unexpected visitor.

Dorcas looked like anything rather than a love-lorn damsel, when she entered, with the bright tints of her plump round cheeks heightened by the frosty air and the haste she had used, her flaxen hair blown into dishevelled ringlets, and her gay blue eyes sparkling through her tears. Our monk-like clerk was startled into something like an unwonted note of admiration at the agreeable vision that thus suddenly broke in upon his solitary studies.

“My old eyes are quite dazzled through my *spettacles*, Mistress Dorcas, by those rosy cheeks of yours, that look brighter than Christmas berries to-night. O lauk! O lauk! if I were but a young man, for your sake!” cried Nehemiah, holding up his lamp, and scanning his comely visitor from head to foot.

Dorcas turned away with a toss of the head.

“Well, well, young woman, don’t be scorn’y,” said Nehemiah: “civility is always worth a smile in payment; and I daresay now you want me to do something for you that you can’t do for yourself.”

Dorcas placed a sheet of paper, a new pen, and a silver tester, on the old oaken table before Nehemiah, with a deep blush and a heavy sigh.

Nehemiah understood a hint as well as some persons would a succinet direction. He shut his

psalter, trimmed his lamp, turned his hour-glass, reached down his inkhorn, arranged the sheet of virgin paper in the proper position on the back of a superannuated leather letter-case, that had once been, like the inkhorn and oaken table, vestry furniture—tried the nib of the pen against his thumb-nail, then dipping it into the inkhorn, motioned to Dorcas to take a seat on the carved church-chest, in which he kept his Sabbath suit of rusty black and the parson's surplice—looked the damsel full in the face, and pointing significantly to the paper, inquired her instructions in the following laconic terms: "Epistle or valentine?"

"Valentine," ejaculated Dorcas, in a faltering voice, and with downcast eyes, a deeper blush mantling her soft cheek.

"Good!" said Nehemiah, referring for the day of the month to Moore's old almanac, which reposed beside his psalter. "Let me see—oh, January twenty-first; St. Agnes to speed! Lucky day, Dorcas, for love affairs."

"Ah, Mister Nehemiah, I wish you may be right!" cried Dorcas; "but, indeed, I isn't at all comfortable in my own mind—no, nor I hasn't been of a long time—not ever since Michaelmas, as I may say, when that good-for-nothing hussy, Hannah Brown, let herself into Farmer Drake's house, so that she might live partner with my young man, Peter Fenn. He

has never fared like the same young man since, and she do boast that he keep company with her instead of me. I should never have thought of Peter for a sweetheart, if he hadn't comed a suitoring arter me Sunday arter Sunday; and last year he sent me the prettiest valentine that ever was found, tied to the latch of the *net-hus* door,* with three sugar kisses and a pink peppermint heart in it."

"What were the words?"

"Oh, Mister Nehemiah, for you to forget them *bootiful* words, when you was the very person what read them for me, and writ the answer to go to him on Old Valentine's Day in reply!"

"Ah, I remember something about it now," said Nehemiah. "But, really, Mistress Dorcas, I write so many valentines, that though I have them all in my head, I seem to forget which goes to which. I am getting an old man now, pretty Dorcas, just on my sixty-six; but it wasn't always so, nor I didn't at one time need to wear 'sights,'" pursued the clerk, taking off his spectacles, and wiping the glasses on a corner of his visitor's apron. "What was your valentine last year, young woman, did you say?"

"Why, Mister Nehemiah, I hasn't forgotten it, if you have," replied Dorcas, "for it was a

* A cow-house in Suffolk is always called a neat-house, pronounced *net-hus*.

proper pretty one. Don't you recollect these lines?—

'If you are ready, I am willing;
All the pretty birds are billing,
And, like them, we'll both be singing.
When we set the bells a ringing.
Join heart, join hand, and faith with mine,
And take me for your valentine.'

"Aye, that was the one," cried Nehemiah.
"Sure I ought to recollect it, as you say, when it was all of my own writing: and wasn't there the picture of a hen and a few chickens drawn at the bottom, by way of an emblem?"

"Certainly," replied Dorcas; "and against the hen was written: 'This here hen is you, Dorcas, when you be my wife.'

'Like this bird that struts in pride,
With all these chickens by her side,
You shall be when you're my bride.'

"I know all about it," said Nehemiah; "and I wrote for you in answer—

'I am single for your sake;
Happy couple we should make.
Oh, how bright the sun did shine
When I saw my valentine!'

And the emblem I limned for you in answer to his, was two hearts painted with red ink, and

linked together with a yellow wedding-ring, to signify as if it were gold; and the posy was—

‘These two hearts are yours and mine,
When I wed my valentine.’”

“Ah!” said Dorcas with a sigh, “that will never come to pass now, I fear; and I am going to send him a different kind of valentine this year.”

“Of course you will,” responded Nehemiah. “It wouldn’t be no kind of use sending the same thing two years running; and you have plenty of time to choose another, you know; so now, what shall it be?”

“It shall begin ‘The rose is red,’” said Dorcas, with great solemnity.

“Good,” replied the amanuensis, writing down that most approved truism of valentine poesy. “The violet’s blue,” pursued he mechanically, repeating the usual continuation of the sentence; but Dorcas hastily interposed with “Apray, sir, don’t say anything about violets this year.”

“What, then, am I to say after ‘The rose is red?’”

“Why,” replied Dorcas, “it must be ‘the leaves are green.’”

“Very true, young woman,” rejoined Nehemiah, placing the tip of his fore-finger against the side

of his nose : " I know the one you mean ; it runs thus—

' The rose is red, the leaves are green,
The days are past that we have seen.' "

" That's a sure thing," sighed Dorcas. " Well, sir, have you wrote that down ? "

" All in good time, young woman," said Nehemiah, who was a slow scribe, and always formed his letters in the most methodical manner, his head generally following the motion of his pen through all its evolutions, with his tongue elongated and protruding beyond his lips, and his chin screwed up all on one side, indicating dots of i's, crosses of t's, and finishing strokes to f's, by significant nods and winks ; whenever he executed a capital letter, he testified his admiration of its appearance by an approbative grin.

Dorcas sat meantime in a state of great mental excitement, with her mouth open, and her round blue eyes full of tears, watching, with intense interest, the pen of her amanuensis, shaking her foot and drumming with her fingers on the table at the same time, as a sort of ventilation to the inward travail of her spirit.

" Young woman," cried Nehemiah, " that 'ont (won't) do ! If you go on beating the devil's tattoo on my table, how do you think I can write your valentine ? I never can spell right when anybody do that."

"Lauk, sir," rejoined Dorcas, "I begs your pardon; I didn't know how *nervish* you were. But how far have you got?"

"Why as far as you told me—'The days are past that we have seen.' I s'pose you would like it to finish—

'If your heart's constant, so is mine,
And so good-morrow, valentine!'"

"Oh dear, Mister Nehemiah, I wish I only durst say that!" cried Dorcas, putting her apron to her eyes; "but how can I, when he hasn't been to see me for twelve Sundays past, and folks do say he keeps company with that impudent mawther * Hannah Brown?"

"Pooh, pooh, Dorcas, you shouldn't give ear to all that folks say."

"No more I doesn't, any more than I can help," said Dorcas; "and I shouldn't believe anything they do say, if Peter hadn't behaved so very *neglecting* to me ever since she has lived partner with him; and I want you to drop a hint of that in the valentine."

Nehemiah took up the sixpence with a signifi-

* An ancient word peculiar to Norfolk, Suffolk, and Cheshire; supposed to be aboriginal British for "a maiden;" but it is now rarely used, excepting by the very vulgar, and then as a term of contempt, though its familiar diminutive "mor," is occasionally applied after the Christian name of a young woman, as a familiar endearment by cottage mothers, in the same sense as the word *bor* is used to young persons of the masculine gender.

cant look, and twirled it on the board, as much as to say: "You have not come down with the proper fee for that sort of business."

Dorcas understood the hint, she drew a small red-leather purse with a tinsel edge from her bosom, and turning it mouth downwards, shook its last coin, another sixpence, into her rosy palm, and pushed it towards the greedy scribe. "It's a crooked one," said she, "and I did keep it for luck. Howsomever, as I have paid my shoemaker's bill, and bought my winter 'parel with my Christmas wages, and hasn't got a debt in the world, I suppose I'm free to part with it."

The heart of the bachelor ecclesiastic was softened by the pathetic tone in which the simple Dorcas entered into this explanation of the state of her finances; and he actually returned both the lucky sixpence and the one she had previously tendered, and professed his intention of "not only writing the valentine, but furnishing the extra poetry she required, gratis."

Those who may think lightly of Nehemiah's generosity on this occasion, can form no adequate idea of the extreme pains which it always cost him to compound a rhyme. Truly, if our parish-clerk had been paid a guinea a couplet, it would have been hard-earned money to him. In the present instance, he was only required to produce an answering line to rhyme

to the following octo-syllabic interrogative, which was *improvised* on the spot by the distressed damsel herself :

“How can you slight your only dear?”

“Well,” quoth the amanuensis, after he copied this moving query from Dorcas’s dictation on the slate, which he always used in original compositions, to prevent the unnecessary ruin of a sheet of paper—“what comes next?”

“Why, lauk, Mister Nehemiah, sir, that is just what I am posed about,” cried Dorcas, “and what I ’spected you to be able to tell me, as you are such a s’prising scholar, and understands almost everything.”

“Don’t you know that it is an awkwardish kind of business to find a rhyme just at a minute’s notice, young woman?” replied Nehemiah gravely.

“That’s a sure thing,” responded Dorcas again; “for as true as I am alive, Mister Nehemiah, I have muddled my brains for the last three weeks, day and night, to try to fish out a rhyme to that there, what I just told you, and it is a mercy that I didn’t forget that by the way. Howsomever, now I talks of that, I must scamper home as fast as I can, and give our poor *wennil* (weanling) calves their suppers, or they’ll raise such a dismal dolour arter their wittles and drink, that my partners will hear the poor dumb

dears *bloring*, and wonder what I am up to, that I hasn't waited on them afore this time a-night. And so, Mister Nehemiah, when you have made a proper consideration, I hope you'll be able to finish that there valentine what we are writing to Peter."

"We, quotha!" cried the scribe, with no less scorn than the organist felt when the organ-blower talked of "our music." "If *I* had no more to do with it than *you* have, Peter would go without a valentine, I believe."

"Apray, Mister Nehemiah, don't fare so ugly-tempered. Of course it's I what sends the valentine, and you writes it; so it is our valentine, or at least I hope it will, when you've finished it up."

CHAPTER II.

POOR Nehemiah did his utmost endeavour to comply with Dorcas's request, to finish up her valentine; but the more he tried, the further off he seemed from the desired conclusion. Rhymes enough there were to "dear," no doubt, but none of them occurred to Nehemiah, save the very inappropriate sub-

stantives beer and steer; and what had they to do with the jealousy and grief of a forsaken maiden, who was desirous of addressing a short pathetic remonstrance in amatory rhymes to her truant lover? So Nehemiah rejected both beer and steer as answering rhymes to "only dear;" and then he thought of clear, and hear, and fear, but could make nothing to the purpose with them. For three successive nights Nehemiah got no sleep for the mental travail he endured in this undertaking; "the Sabbath dawned, no day of rest to him," for even when he entered upon his ecclesiastical duties, his thoughts were profanely labouring at the provoking couplet he was expected to complete, and he committed a series of blunders quite astonishing to the vicar and congregation. Thrice did he read the parson's verses instead of his own in the psalms, twice he groaned out "O dear" instead of "Amen," and once he ejaculated an audible "Amen" in the middle of the sermon.

Never was a solitary bachelor, who had no experience in love affairs of his own, so perplexed about compounding love-verses for others. Still, it was only half a couplet, after all, that was required of him, but that half couplet comprised more difficulties in its brief space than Nehemiah could master. "It hadn't no reason in it," he said; and he could not make anything

of a seasonable nature to jingle with it, though he kept counting up on his fingers with every word that was anything like a clink to "dear."

Many were the clandestine visits that Dorcas contrived to make to Nehemiah, to inquire "if he had finished up *their* valentine," but all were fruitless: a fortnight glided away, and still the unfinished couplet remained on Nehemiah's slate, hanging up behind the door, without an answering rhyme. At last, in the middle of his master's sermon, a thought popped into Nehemiah's noddle, which he considered so felicitous, that, lest it should escape again, and be for ever lost to Dorcas, Peter, and the world, he, with a trembling hand, stole forth his brass pencil-case, and privily booked it on the fly-leaf of the parish prayer-book, though it was, even in his own opinion, a positive act of sacrilege. But the temptation was too great to be resisted. It was impossible to lose this precious line—

"To court another, as I hear,"

which made so pretty and applicable a conclusion to the first line of the couplet—

"How can you slight your only dear?"

Dorcas, however, was not satisfied with it; she protested "that it had no particular sinification. She wanted to give Peter a hint who it was he slighted her for," she said.

Nehemiah was highly provoked at the dissatisfaction of his fair client, and told her: "If she did not like that ending, she must finish it herself, for it had been more trouble to him than twenty christenings with deaf godfathers."

Dorcas replied "that it wasn't of no use sending it as it was;" and passionately besought him, as it still wanted a week to Valentine's Day, that he would make a further consideration for the purpose of finishing up the valentine.

Nehemiah found it impossible to resist the entreaties of such a winning nymph as our love-lorn dairy maid; so he fairly suffered himself to be hag-ridden for nearly another week with "the confounded couplet," as he called it; and it was not till the very eve of St. Valentine, just as Dorcas was lifting the latch of his door to make a last, almost hopeless inquiry, "if he had finished up their valentine?" that another bright idea popped into his head.

"Come in, Dorcas dear!" he exclaimed in his ecstasy; "I have it now."

"Well," cried Dorcas, fixing her round blue eyes upon the inspired clerk, in eager expectation, "what is it?"

"Hand me the slate, that I may put it down, and then I'll tell you. No, I won't tell you, but I will read it altogether," continued he, as he inscribed the parish valentine-slate with the precious morsel, which he called

“a very ’spectable finish up,” to the long halting lyric.

“Now, then, for it !” cried he, and, after clearing his throat with a sonorous “Hi ! ha ! hum !” he read in a pompous chanting recitative—

“The rose is red, the leaves are green,
The days are past that we have seen;
How can you slight your only dear,
For one who lives so near ?”

“That will do !” cried Dorcas, snapping her fingers, her inexperienced ear by no means missing the two lacking feet in the metre, in her extreme satisfaction at Nehemiah having hit upon something that would fulfil her intention of giving Peter an intimation, that she was aware of the proximity of the rival, whose wiles had supplanted her.

The valentine was duly transcribed on the sheet of paper without any accident of blot or blur, folded up, sealed with the top of Dorcas’s thimble, and wrapped in a scrap of brown paper, addressed,

“For *Mister* PETER FENN,
“Hoss driver, at Mister Drake’s,
Farmer.
“With speed.”

This billet was discovered by Peter on the morning of Valentine’s Day, reposing in the

corn-measure out of which he was accustomed to deal the first feed of oats to his horses. He secured it with much satisfaction, though the contents, of course, remained a mystery to the unlettered swain. According to his own account, however, "It made him fare very comfortable all the morning, for he took it to plough with him in his waistcoat-pocket, but thought it must have burned a hole there, he did so long to know who it came from, and what it was about, but he durstn't loose the horses till noon, and then he lost his own dinner by running off to the clerk's house to get his valentine read while they were baiting."

CHAPTER III.

NEHEMIAH protested "he was quite hoarse with reading valentines that morning, there had been such a power of young people up with their valentines, for him to read, and some that did not belong to the parish, too, who brought valentines that were very hard to make any sense of; however, those young people who had a parish-clerk that could not read writing were certainly objects of charity, and he did all his possibles to make out all he could for them." At

length, his harangue being at an end, he extended his hand for Peter's *billet-doux*, and gratified his longing ears by making him acquainted with the contents.

Peter was greatly touched by the tender reproach contained in the hopping couplet that had so long baffled Nehemiah's powers of rhyming. "Apray, Mister Nehemiah," said he, "doesn't that come from Dorcas Mayhew?"

Nehemiah calmly replied, "I believe it do."

"Well, narbor," rejoined Peter, seating himself on the old church-chest, "I don't think I have used that *gal* well."

"That is a sure thing, young man," said Nehemiah; "but you know your own business best, I s'pose?"

"I can't say as how I do," replied Peter in a doleful whine; "for I have got into a sort of hobble between Dorcas and another young woman."

"Whose fault is that?" asked Nehemiah.

"Why, I s'pose Dorcas thinks it be my fault," responded Peter; "but that other *gal* would not let me be at quiet, and was always axing me for my company, and making so much of me when I comed in at meal-times, that, somehow or other, I was forced to stay at home with her on Sunday evenings, instead of going to see Dorcas, because she always went into *high-sterricks* if I talked of going after Dorcas. But I tell you

what, Mister Nehemiah, I am right sick of her nonsense; for, as true as I'm alive, I do think she henpecks me all the same as if she were my wife."

"Sarve you right, young man, I say, if you are *fule* big enough to put up with it."

"Why," responded Peter, "I wouldn't, if I could get my neck out of the collar, as the saying is. But what is your advice?"

"You hain't paid me for reading that there valentine yet," observed Nehemiah.

Peter drew out a yellow canvas-bag, capacious enough to have served the squire, and disbursed the expected sixpence.

"Thank you, young man," said the clerk. "And now I'll tell you what I would do, if so be as I were situated as you are: I would just have my banns put up with Dorcas next Sunday."

"O lauk!" cried Peter, "that 'on't do, for I'm letten to master till Michaelmas, and he 'on't approve of my entering another sarvice; and a pretty life I should lead with Hannah in the house with me all the time the banns were being axed; and then I'm not quite sartain that Dorcas would consent to that, for she holds her head properly high when we meet now, and I can't say as how I like the thoughts of humbling to her, she is such a proud toad."

"No wonder," cried Nehemiah, "for half the

young fellows in the parish are ready to hang themselves for love of her; and if you don't take care, you will be left in the lurch while you are playing fast and loose, and halting like an ass between two bundles of hay; for Dorcas isn't a girl that is reduced to go a suitoring to a young man, like your partner Hannah. If you were to know all the sixpences and shillings I have taken for writing valentines to her this week, you'd begin to look about you."

"For writing valentines to my Dorcas?" whined Peter in dismay. "Why, apray, who did you write them for, Mister Nehemiah?"

"That isn't fair to ask," said the scribe, "because I might get into trouble if I told tales out of school."

Peter sat and bit his nails in a profound fit of meditation for several minutes; at last he rose up with a foolish grin, and said: "I'll tell you what, Mister Nehemiah; I'll send Dorcas a valentine myself, and you shall write it for me."

"Against *Owd* Valentine's Day, I s'pose you mean?"

"No, but I doesn't: I means this blessed Young St. Valentine's Day," quoth Peter. ' *Owd* fellows like you may wait till *Owd* St. Valentine's Day, but I'm for the young saint, if so be you can make it convenable to get

that there done against I take my *hosses* off at six in the evening."

"That depends upon circumstances," replied Nehemiah; "and what sort of a one you want to have."

"Why," said Peter, "my grandmother had a *bootiful* one sent to her by her first husband when he was suitoring, before they were married, and she fancied he slighted her. I daresay she would lend it to me for you to pattern arter."

"I daresay I know your grandmother's valentine," said Nehemiah, "if you can tell me how it begins."

"I think I can," said Peter.

"The rose is red, the violet's blue.
I swear I never loved but you;
The turtle never doubts her mate,
Then why doubt me, my bonny Kate?"

"That won't do," interrupted Nehemiah; "for Dorcas can't stand in Kate's shoes."

"No, but we might change the rhyme and keep the sense. I really do think I shall turn a *pôte* myself."

"It isn't quite so easy to turn *pôte*, as you call it," said Nehemiah. "However, I'll get my slate and write down all the potery you can say."

"Then," said Peter, "you must put down—

'The turtle never doubts the dove,
Then why doubt me, my only love?'"

"That isn't out of your own head, Peter?" cried Nehemiah.

"Never you mind that, old fellow, but put down what I bid you, for there's more in my head than you thinks of, p'r'aps," said Peter; "only I must go and see arter my hosses now, for it's time for our second journey; but I will step here at half-past six, and tell you the rest; and if you get it fairly written out for me, and two doves, with a wedding-ring in their bills, drafted on to the paper, I'll tip you a whole shilling, and shew you that I am a cap-able *pôte* in spite of all your *cisums*."

Nehemiah, who was by no means disposed to cherish an infant muse in his own parish, treated these indications of Peter's *poetic* genius with a certain dry sarcastic acerbity, which shewed that nature had intended him for a reviewer, not a bard. Peter, however, like most youthful rhymsters, was too much taken up with his own newly-discovered powers of jingling to allow his poetic ardour to be chilled by the discouragement of an elder brother in the art.

"Now, Mister Nehemiah," cried he, when he burst into the clerk's cottage as soon as he had finished his appointed tasks in the

field and the stable, "what do you think of this for a finish to our valentine?—

"Tis you alone I mean to marry,
Then why, sweet Dorcas, should we tarry?
The birds have all chosen their mates for the year,
But I'm not so happy—I wail for my dear;
My heart is still constant, and if you'll be mine,
Say "Yes," and "for ever," my own valentine!"

"Think!" said Nehemiah—"that it's well worth half-a-crown to write down such a lot of out-of-the-way stuff, Peter; and I don't believe your grandmother ever had such a valentine in her life."

"Why, she sartainly hadn't anything about my Dorcas in her valentine; but I kind of patterned arter hers, for all that, in mine, and the rest of it, what suit my own case, I made while I was at plough."

"No wonder all the parish make a mock of your crooked furrows, young man, if you waste your master's time, and let your horses work the land in hills and holes, while you are muddling your head after such nonsense. I hope you don't mean to send that to the girl; she won't know what to make of it."

"O won't she?" cried Peter. "Come, get your slate, and scratch away, or we shan't get it written down o' this side midnight."

With a very ill grace, Nehemiah complied, and it was only through the prevailing rhetoric of a

third sixpence that Peter at length had the satisfaction of seeing his valentine completed, sealed, and indorsed as follows:—

“For Miss DORCAS MAYHEW,

“Dairy-maid at the Squire’s

“Great White House.

“In haste.”

Dorcas was made happy by the receipt of the welcome missive that very night, and slept with it under her pillow. The following evening, after milking, she paid another stolen visit to the parish-clerk, to be enlightened as to the nature of its contents; and as she left Nehemiah’s cottage with a joyous heart and bounding step, she encountered the author of the precious rhymes lingering among the ruins of St. Edmund’s Abbey. All differences were made up between the lately estranged lovers during their walk home, and they agreed that their banns should be asked for the first time next Sunday.

Peter stood the storm of Hannah’s wrath and disappointment, with the firmness of a stoic, all the time the banns of matrimony between him and Dorcas Mayhew were in progress of publication, in our parish church; and in spite of all the “*high-sterricks*” the said Hannah Brown could get up on the occasion, the nuptials were duly solemnized between him and Dorcas at the earliest possible day; after their

"*sibright** was out-asked," that is to say, when their banns had been published on three successive Sundays.

Farmer Drake objected, at first, to his horse-driver marrying; but as Peter promised not to leave his service till Michaelmas, and Dorcas was also willing to retain her place at the "White House," till Peter could hire a cottage for them to go to house-keeping comfortably, all things were made smooth.

The Squire gave them a wedding dinner, and a general invitation for Peter to drink tea and sup with his bride every Sunday afternoon, at the "White House," till Michaelmas day, when Peter, being released from his year's service, conducted Dorcas to their own home, laden with presents from her master and mistress, and all the young ladies.

* This ancient word, which dates from the days of Romanism, explains its own derivative and signification, that the candidates for holy matrimony were not related to each other within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity—literally, that the *sib* was right.

VIII.

THE PARISH SURGEON, HIS WIVES, AND WIDOW.

CHAPTER I.

LAWRENCE DEANE, the parish surgeon of Woodfield, had been thrice wedded, and each of his marriages had been fruitful.

His first wedlock was contracted early in life. It was a strictly professional alliance, and the stepping stone to fortune. The only daughter and heiress of the village Esculapius, to whom he had served his medical apprenticeship, took a liking to him, and her father, beginning to feel the infirmities of age, proposed taking Lawrence into partnership, on condition of his marrying her, and performing the more laborious duties of the good practice his skill and attention had assisted in establishing.

It was an offer not to be refused by a person of common-sense, although the lady was some fifteen years his senior, and neither pretty nor pleasing. Lawrence was, however, destitute of

the goods of fortune, and prudently overlooking the want of attractions in his proffered bride, took her in the same spirit with which he would have swallowed an aloes pill, not as a thing agreeable, but expedient.

At the death of her father, he came into possession of the whole of an extensive practice, a well fitted-up surgery, and a pretty house and garden. But these, together with five thousand pounds in ready money, were strictly settled by the old gentleman on Mrs. Deane and her children after the decease of her husband.

This was no disappointment to Lawrence Deane. He considered his wife had the best right to inherit her father's goods, and was perfectly satisfied with the life interest he enjoyed in them; nor, absorbed as he was in the cares of his professional duties, did he bestow any cares on pecuniary matters. Mrs. Deane kept his books, wrote out all his bills, and generally managed to collect the proceeds.

With this lady, who was a painful, careful, and bustling housewife, Lawrence Deane lived a checkered but not very quiet life of connubial happiness, for the period of one and twenty years, when, following the course of the wives of other medical men, she departed this life, leaving him two sons and two daughters, rapidly advancing to men and women's estate.

About twelve months after her decease, Mr.

Deane was summoned to attend upon a young and lovely invalid, the only child of a family of wealth and consequence, who had taken lodgings in the village of Woodfield, for the benefit of her health, on account of the reputed salubrity of the spot, and the skill of Mr. Deane in nervous and consumptive cases, for which, deservedly or not, he was celebrated in the neighbourhood.

Matilda Harrington had been a confirmed valetudinarian ever since she left school. The over-anxiety of her fond parents, on account of the delicacy of her constitution, having become too apparent to her, had had the effect of rendering her such. They had infected her with their apprehensions. She was uneasy at every change in the weather, declined taking exercise unless in a carriage, lest it should bring on fever through over-fatigue; she abandoned both work and study as injurious to her nerves; and, being without occupation, was, of course, the prey to listless *ennui*, languor, and indisposition.

Her parents had mistaken her case; it was lively society, bodily exercise, and mental employment she required, not physic. Her sole happiness, however, consisted in swallowing pills and potions, and she received, or fancied she received, so much benefit from those that were administered to her by Mr. Lawrence Deane, that she fell in love with him out of pure gratitude, for it would be absurd to ascribe

her affection to any other source, since the worthy practitioner, though certainly a handsome, agreeable, and amiable man, was more than old enough to have been her father. Matilda Harrington was, in fact, precisely the same age with his youngest daughter.

There is, however, no accounting for the freaks of the wayward blind god, who must certainly, in this instance, have made use of pills as his ammunition in assailing the heart of the fair young patient of Lawrence Deane; and so successful was his physical archery, that the love-sick damsel, waving all maidenly reserve, revealed her passion in explicit terms to the astonished object thereof, and prevailed upon him to consent to an immediate marriage.

Their banns were discreetly mumbled over on three successive Sundays by an obliging curate, the friend of Lawrence Deane, who relished the joke excessively, and made no scruple of uniting the ill-assorted pair in the indissoluble bonds of wedlock on the following Monday.

Great was the mirth which these ill assorted nuptials afforded to all the quizzers in the neighbourhood; and not to them alone, for every one laughed except the friends of the bride, who were overwhelmed with astonishment and indignation at the conduct of the fair invalid, whom they utterly renounced in the bitterness of their displeasure. But it was not possible for the

parents of the bride to testify greater dissatisfaction on this occasion, than was evinced by the children of the bridegroom, whose wrath at their father's second marriage, passed all bounds.

Their conduct to Matilda was influenced by these hostile feelings, and she quickly found that the stories of cruel step-mothers and ill-treated step-children were reversed in her case, for her step-children were the persecutors, and she the persecuted victim of their malice.

It is scarcely possible to imagine an insult or mortification to which she was not exposed; and while her gentle and forbearing temper forbade her to complain to her husband of the ill-treatment she received from his family, they, instead of being touched by her magnanimity, attributed her silence to fear, and continued to vex and torment her in every possible way.

The birth of a daughter, which in due time followed her marriage, aggravated their displeasure, and there were no terms indicative of hatred and contempt which they scrupled to apply to the luckless babe, and more unlucky mother. Matilda's feeble constitution and broken spirit sunk under the trial. She died five years after her ill-starred marriage, leaving a weakly little girl, of four years old, to the tender mercies of her step-children.

An early grave, or a life of misery, would doubtless have been the lot of this poor infant,

had not her father, fortunately for her, thought proper to marry again, after a very brief period of widowerhood.

CHAPTER II.

It could not be said that either interest or pride had any influence with Mr. Lawrence Deane, in his third choice, for he espoused the portionless orphan of a humble curate, whom dire necessity had compelled to fill the post of teacher in the village school, where unremitting exertions, both of mind and body, were exacted from her, in return for a stipend, every way inadequate to the wants of a young female who was expected to preserve the outward appearance of a lady.

A long and dangerous illness, in which she was attended by Mr. Deane, brought her deeply into his debt, but, at the same time, afforded him so many opportunities of becoming acquainted with her mild firmness under suffering, her meekness, her piety, and resignation, that she became more touchingly interesting to him than any female he had ever known, and when, on her first advances towards convalescence, she acquainted him with the state of her finances,

and lamented the impossibility of offering him more than a very paltry instalment towards his bill, he generously assured her "that the happiness of having been enabled to render her a service was more than sufficient payment to him." From that day he became very particular in his attentions, continuing his professional visits to Miss Charlotte Grove long after they had ceased to be necessary, and when he was absolutely compelled to discharge her from his list of patients, he made her an explicit offer of his hand and heart, in truly lover-like terms.

Women rarely take warning by the fate of a former wife, if it chance to suit either their fancy or convenience to wed a widower; so Charlotte Grove thought proper to marry the doctor, and take upon herself the formidable office of step-mother to the offspring of both her predecessors. Those of the first Mrs. Deane were, in age, pretty nearly her contemporaries. They were far more exasperated at the third marriage of their father than they had been at his second, and prepared to give his bride very unequivocal testimony of their hostility. They had, however, to deal with a very different person from the unfortunate Matilda.

The third Mrs. Deane was a good-humoured and amiable, but high-spirited young woman, and had been accustomed to stem the rough billows of a stormy world, almost from childhood. She

was young in years, but old in experience, and mature in judgment, and possessed of a strength of character that rendered her perfectly equal to all the difficulties of her situation. On the first indications of open insult and contempt that were offered to her by her step-sons and daughters, she calmly but impressively assured them that, although it was her earnest desire to live on terms of amity and good fellowship with them, yet she considered it no part of her duty to submit to insolence and oppression, and bade them reflect how materially the general prosperity of a family depended on their living as became Christians, united by so close a bond of connexion which, however it might be warped and strained by their hostile conduct, could not be broken, and conjured them, for the sake of their own respectability and comfort, to conduct themselves with decency under existing circumstances.

Mr. Lawrence Deane was a quiet worthy man, too much absorbed in the studies and duties of his profession to pay much attention to anything beside, and though he always took the part of his young wife, when personally appealed to in any of these domestic jars, yet, unless that were the case, he never interfered, but like the patriarch Jacob, in holy writ, left his woman-kind to settle their differences as well as they could, and held a perfect neutrality.

He had taken his eldest son into partnership ; his youngest was established as a surgeon, in a neighbouring town ; but his two daughters, Hannah and Martha, having neither personal nor mental charms to recommend them, were likely to continue members of the family circle, to his great sorrow ; for, having no love affairs to engage their thoughts and attention, they were perpetually busying themselves with the concerns of their neighbours, and rendering themselves odious to every person in the vicinity, but especially so to Mrs. Deane, who was the object of universal commiseration, for being constantly exposed to the irritation of their society.

Charlotte was, however, perfectly equal to that and every other trial. She assumed with a firm, though by no means despotie hand, the reins of government, and soon established herself as the mistress of her husband's house, in spite of all opposition. Not that she ever presumed to invade the rights and privileges of others, but she insisted on having her own recognised, and while she scrupulously refrained from exerting the slightest show of authority over the elder part of her husband's family, she extended her protection, in the most decided manner, to the forlorn and persecuted orphan of her unfortunate predecessor, who had inherited the ill will they bore to her deceased mother.

This despised and neglected little one Charlotte took to her kindly heart, and long before the actual feelings of a mother had taught her to look with compassion on the helpless orphan of another, she treated her with not less than maternal tenderness; nor did she, when children of her own were born, in rapid succession, alter her countenance towards this object of her benevolent sympathy, for the little Matilda was endeared to her as powerfully by the sweet influence of pity and Christian charity as the babes who derived their existence from herself, and were nourished at her bosom.

It was pretty to observe the confiding fondness with which the child repaid this generous love, and reposed its infant joys and sorrows on the protectress whom Providence had raised up for her, and the benignant and equal manner in which Charlotte divided her caresses and her cares between her own beloved offspring and her orphan step-daughter; while her propriety of deportment, self-denial, forbearance, and conscientious performance of all her duties, whether agreeable or painful, compelled even the most malignant of her domestic foes to treat her with respect.

CHAPTER III.

THERE was another person in the family scarcely less unfortunate than the little Matilda, to whom Charlotte, as far as her power went, extended the kind offices of sympathy and benevolence. This was Anthony Willis, a medical pupil of her husband, an orphan youth, of genteel parentage, interesting appearance, and very considerable talents and acquirements, but entirely destitute of the gifts of fortune, a liberal education having been all the wealth his father had been able to bestow upon him.

Anthony Willis had been born to better prospects, and reared in the lap of luxury and indulgence, but the failure of a speculation, in which his father had been imprudently induced to enter, had reduced that gentleman from comparative affluence to absolute indigence, and he died, of that most painful of all maladies, the mental fever of disappointed hope, very soon after he had placed his son with Mr. Deane, leaving the boy entirely dependent on the niggard bounty of a rich brother, to supply him even with the necessary means of purchasing raiment.

To a high spirited and generous youth it was agony, and worse than agony, to wring from

the cold-hearted worldling a stinted pittance for this purpose, which was not accorded without grudge and grumble, and remarks, for the endurance of which no money could compensate to an independent mind; and the sum, when received, was very inadequate to the purpose of enabling him to maintain a respectable appearance, even in the comparatively humble family of a village surgeon and apothecary, not leaving him, when he had paid for his shoes and washing, and one suit of clothes in two years, a single shilling towards the little floating expenses to which he, as well as others, was liable.

These pecuniary difficulties, which precluded him from entering into the society of young people of his own age, exposed him to the contemptuous insolence of the young Deanes, who were well acquainted with the limited state of his finances, and assuming airs of superiority in consequence, treated him with bitter mockery or studied neglect. Their sisters pursued the same line of conduct towards him, and rendered his domestic hours, when spent in the family sitting-room, completely wretched.

While Mr. Deane remained a widower, Anthony Willis found his situation one which required no slight share of philosophy and patience to endure. A thousand times was he on the point of yielding to his indignant feelings and breaking from the fetters of the legal instrument

by which he was bound to remain, for the term of five years, with Mr. Deane. Not that he had even the shadow of a grievance to complain of from him, who was one of the kindest and most indulgent of human beings, but the behaviour of his family was calculated to drive any person of quick feelings, to desperation. Anthony was, however, fortunately restrained from the rash act he contemplated, by the reflection that, in so doing, he should gratify the malice of his unfeeling persecutors, and materially injure his own prospects in life. Arming himself, therefore, with a tenfold portion of firmness and equanimity, he endured the irksomeness of his temporary lot with an appearance of lofty indifference, secluding himself when at home in the solitude of his own chamber, where he pursued his studies uninterruptedly, escaping by that means the domineering insolence of Mr. Roger Deane in the surgery; and the aggravating speeches of the young ladies, Martha and Hannah, in the parlour, where both united in tormenting him.

These mortifications and trials, however hard to be borne, were not without their advantages to himself, for being entirely shut out from all the amusements and pleasures of his age, by his want of pocket money, and driven from all the social enjoyments of domestic society by the unamiable manners of those with whom his lot

was cast, he was thrown entirely upon his own resources for means of diverting the tedium of his lonely hours, and found, in the pursuits of learning and science, those pleasures which a mind like his never could have experienced in the frivolous round of dissipation, from which he was, fortunately for himself, precluded. He soon became devoted to his profession, he lost no opportunities of improving his natural talents by study and reflection, and thus acquired a skill and experience to which few students attain at so early an age.

Yet there were times in which Anthony Willis felt, and keenly felt, the state of isolation in which he was placed. With a heart formed for the indulgence of all the kindly emotions and affections of human nature, he stood alone in the world, without one tie of kindred or of love. Overflowing as he was with the best and tenderest of feelings, it appeared to him as one of the most painful circumstances in his dreary fate that there was not a single creature, with the exception of the poor patients whom he attended, and to whom his benevolent manners infinitely endeared him, on whom to bestow these feelings.

Under such circumstances it was not wonderful that poor little Matilda, who was no less despised and persecuted than himself, should become an object of interest to the young student.

This child he beheld with feelings of the

most lively sympathy, which very soon increased to doating fondness, and to him alone was she indebted for those kindly endearments and attentions to her health and comfort, so necessary in the tender season of childhood, for want of which she would, in all probability, have perished.

Before the place of the mother, whom she had so early lost, was supplied by the worthy and high principled young woman whom Lawrence Deane had selected for his third wife, Anthony Willis was all the world to Matilda. His chamber was her city of refuge, his knee her seat, and his bosom her pillow.

He was her playmate, her nurse, and her sweet familiar friend; and her affection was the only charm the uncongenial home of Anthony Willis possessed.

In the heart's utter loneliness it is so sweet to be assured of the genuine love of any object, however unmeet to be a companion. It is this feeling that endears her cat to the solitary spinster; and his dog to the friendless beggar. With what pleasure, then, may we imagine were the fond caresses of the grateful child received by her young protector. Very dear were this pair to each other, and, notwithstanding the disparity in their years, they were reciprocal soothers and consolers in every sorrow or misfortune that befel them.

The condition of both was, as I have before stated, materially improved by the third marriage of the worthy surgeon, with Charlotte Grove, who having herself been exposed to many sorrows and hardships, felt that sympathy for the unfortunate which is so natural an emotion with those who have been made acquainted with the sweet uses of adversity.

Nor was sympathy all she bestowed towards ameliorating the difficulties of the young student. There are many little offices that may truly be called charitable, which, without costing much to those by whom they are accorded, are often of the most important service to the recipient parties.

The apparently inconsequential, but in reality distressing, expenses of washing and mending, which had hitherto been a source of anxiety and embarrassment to Anthony, were now spared to him, everything of that kind being cheerfully and gratuitously performed for him in the house, under the liberal ministration of its new mistress. Those only who have experienced the misery incidental to a purse in the last stage of a rapid consumption, can conceive the feelings of satisfaction with which the poor student contemplated his nicely ironed and plaited shirts, discreetly folded cravats, and neatly mended stockings, all ready to put on at a minute's notice, ranged in exquisite order in his drawer, without the accompanying

alloy of one of these importunate-looking blotted slips of paper, yept a washerwoman's bill, staring him in the face, with the silent question, "How will you pay me?"

Anthony's gratitude to the good fairy who performed these benevolent offices for him, was more than proportionable to the service, and quite equal to the kindness of heart which had prompted it.

This seasonable relief was the means of enabling him to obtain many little articles, which, though indispensably necessary, he had been hitherto compelled to do without, nor could any one who had never experienced the bitterness and mortification of stinted means, imagine the essential comfort he enjoyed from this reduction of his weekly expenses.

CHAPTER IV.

ANTHONY lived on terms of the most perfect friendship and confidence with Mrs. Deane, till the term of his apprenticeship to her husband had expired, when a trifling legacy from an old friend of his father enabled him to visit London, for the purpose of completing his medical studies, by attending the lectures, and

going through a course of anatomical practice, at the hospitals.

His presence was greatly missed, not only by Mrs. Deane and his pet Matilda, but by all the poorer patients in the village, to whom he had been a humane and tender friend. By no one was he regretted more than by Mr. Lawrence Deane himself, who had been accustomed to place implicit reliance on his judgment in all difficult cases, being perfectly aware that the skill of his pupil very far exceeded his own, and even counterbalanced the advantages which upwards of forty years' experience in his profession had given him.

The worthy surgeon was now fast descending into the vale of years, and began to grow unequal to the fatigues of his practice; the assistance which he received from his son Roger scarcely compensated for the contemptuous insolence of the young man's manner, not only to every one whom he deemed beneath him or within his power, but also to himself, on the slightest difference of opinion, or exercise of paternal authority. This was, of course, very irksome to the old gentleman, who appeared to have been deprived of his right hand by the loss of his pupil, and scarcely a day elapsed in which he did not exclaim, "I have become a cipher in my profession since the departure of that excellent lad, Anthony Willis, who was more

like a son to me than either of those who call me father."

These reflections, combined with the increasing fatigues which devolved on him, in consequence of Anthony's departure, and the growing infirmities of old age, contributed to sharpen the canker-tooth of care, and brought on a lingering, but fatal malady, which conducted him by slow, yet sure steps towards the grave. Sometimes, when Lawrence Deane contemplated an infant family rising round him, consisting of five young children, to whom an increase might shortly be expected, he felt inclined to censure his own imprudence in contracting his last marriage, when he considered that he might be removed from his children while they were yet in their helpless infancy, and that he must leave them very scantily provided with the means of subsistence.

Yet although he felt inexpressible anxiety on that account, he could not regret a measure which had so materially promoted his happiness as his marriage with Charlotte Grove, whose temper was like perpetual sunshine, enlivening and cheering everything within its influence. The thought of leaving this beloved and faithful partner and her infant family to struggle, unsupported, with the difficulties to which he felt she must shortly be exposed, added pangs to his death-bed sufferings. These, as is too commonly the case, notwithstanding the warning of a long

illness, came unexpectedly upon him at last, and found him in temporal affairs (at least) unprepared to meet the important change that awaited him.

With anguish in his heart, and inquietude in his looks, he endeavoured to provide a remedy for his omission by summoning his elder children to his bedside, to whom he said, "There is one subject which embitters the hour of my departure from this troublous stage of existence, and on which I now desire to address you, my children. I have, with unpardonable procrastination, deferred making my will, till it is too late, for I feel myself now incapable of doing it otherwise than verbally, for my moments are numbered, and few, very few, now remain, even for me to express my intentions as to the disposal of the sum of two thousand pounds, for which I have, at the expense of many personal privations, insured my life. This is the whole of my property, and the only provision I have been able to make for my widow and the helpless part of my family, for whose exclusive benefit I had designed it, and to whom I should have secured it, had I been able to have executed a legal instrument for that purpose. You, my sons, are both comparatively well off in worldly matters; you are established in your professions, and you and your elder sisters will inherit the property derived from your grandfather's will and your mother's

settlement. The expenses attending your education have been far more than equivalent to that portion of the insurance which the law would enable you to claim, if you thought proper to take advantage of my negligence in not securing the whole to my widow during her life, and to my seven destitute children after her decease. But I trust, my sons, that so far from attempting to invade this paltry pittance, which you must be aware is very inadequate to their maintenance and education, you will prove your dutiful respect for my memory by assisting them with such additions to their scanty income as you may be able occasionally to afford from the profits of your practice."

Lawrence Deane then bestowed upon each of his children the solemn blessing of a dying father. He was much affected with the innocent grief of such of his young family as were able to comprehend the nature of their approaching bereavement, and no less so by the smiles of the unconscious infant in the nurse's arms, which was so soon to be deprived of a father's protection; nor was he forgetful of the still more desolate condition in which he left poor Matilda, who would be thus doubly orphaned before she had completed her thirteenth year. He felt that it would be unreasonable to ask Charlotte, who was already burdened with so large an infant family, to which she hourly expected to add

another, to take charge of her destitute step-child also. Clasp^{ing} Matilda to his bosom in an agony of paternal grief, he exclaimed,

“Alas! poor motherless girl, who will watch over thy unprotected youth, and guide and cherish thee when I am gone?”

“And can you, my Lawrence, imagine me capable of forsaking your child in her utmost need?” said the weeping Charlotte, half reproachfully. “Is she not the sister of my own children, and was she not mine by adoption, before I knew a mother’s joys or a mother’s cares?” she added; “and think you then, my husband, that while I have a morsel of bread to divide among my children, I could refuse a share to her, whom I consider a yet more sacred trust, committed to my care, not only by a dying husband, but by God himself?”

The expiring man pressed the hands of his generous wife to his cold lips, and blessed her with his last breath, telling her at the same time that she had taken the bitterest sting from death, since he could now depart in peace.

Very different would have been the feelings of the anxious husband and father, had he been aware that it was the intention of the sons, to whom he had so pathetically and solemnly appealed in behalf of his widow and infant children, to dispute with them a share of the scanty provision he had made for them. Yet

no sooner were his remains consigned to the grave, than they proceeded to enforce the law which divides the personal property of intestate persons. Their sisters, equally mercenary and unfeeling, united in the same demand. Mrs. Deane knew it would be fruitless to contest, and saw herself, and the helpless beings dependent on her care, reduced to a pittance, the interest of which was plainly insufficient to provide them with a home and daily bread, without reckoning anything for the expenses of clothing, fire, and education. The latter, indeed, she was well qualified to bestow on her girls, but her two eldest children were boys, who would soon require more than was in her power to impart.

In this dilemma, Charlotte, though much perplexed, was not cast down, nor did she for one moment distrust the guardian care of her heavenly Father, who, she felt inwardly assured, would support her in her approaching hour of peril, and raise up friends for her and her fatherless little ones. She was not disappointed in her reliance; she had cast her care upon One who cared for her, and she received help in due season.

CHAPTER V.

THE morning after Mrs. Deane had given birth to her seventh child, an unexpected visitor entered her chamber, summoned by the news of her distress, which had been faithfully communicated by Matilda, who was his constant correspondent. It was Anthony Willis, her late husband's assistant.

The absence of three years of checkered fortunes, in the busy scenes of a professional life in the great metropolis, had not effaced from his grateful heart the remembrance of the many obligations he owed to the disconsolate widow, for her generous kindness and sympathy, at a time when it was more to him than words could express.

The sight of him renewed the grief, which, for a brief space, had been converted into feelings of gratitude to Heaven, that she had been spared to her young family, received a happy deliverance from the pains and perils of childbirth; and although the birth of her babe would undoubtedly add to her difficulties, yet maternal love could not forbear from adding, as an additional motive for thankfulness, "that she had been blessed with a living infant, a lovely girl." But at the very moment when Matilda,

who was delighted with her new plaything, after placing it in Anthony's arms, had succeeded in extorting from him an assent to her eager demand, "if it were not a perfect beauty, and the sweetest creature that ever was seen?" the disconsolate widow, remembering the calamitous circumstances under which the fatherless babe was born, gave vent to her grief in a passion of tears, exclaiming, "Alas! alas! poor orphan child, who knoweth whether we shall be able to provide bread for thee and thy helpless brothers and sisters?"

"Fear not," replied Anthony, taking her hand kindly, "neither you nor any part of your family shall suffer a single privation, if it be in my power to prevent it."

"Alas! my good Anthony, and what can you do who are yourself so friendless?" said the widow despondingly.

"Much, I trust," replied Anthony, "if I am so fortunate as to succeed in my design of engaging a small house in this village, and commencing practice as a surgeon and apothecary, for our mutual benefit. I have already drawn up a statement of my intentions and motives, which I shall insert in the county papers, and I venture to hope that, among the families whom I attended as assistant to your late husband, some may be found willing to employ me for your sake as well as mine, in preference to Mr.

Roger Deane, whose talents are not of an order sufficiently brilliant to awe me from entering the lists with him, especially when mine will be exerted in the behalf of the widow and fatherless."

Of his own skill and acquirements in his profession the young man spoke not, yet they had been pronounced, by Sir Astley Cooper himself, to be of no common kind. Anthony Willis had gone through the usual examinations with great *eclât*, and had been considered one of the most promising students that had appeared for many seasons, nor were there wanting those who predicted that he would attain to the highest rank in his profession, if he continued to practise in that great emporium of talent, the metropolis.

Anthony was ambitious and emulous of fame, but with a generous self-devotion, which amounted almost to heroism, he resolved to give up every personal consideration for the sake of the distressed widow and her family. To say that it cost him no struggle before he made this sacrifice, would be asserting too much, for he was fully aware of all he resigned, but it was no less from a principle of gratitude than from motives of benevolence that he resolved on this line of conduct, and his resolution once taken, he adhered to it with undeviating firmness.

His progress was slow, and he had more

difficulties to contend against than he had calculated, in addition to his youth and extreme poverty. Mr. Roger Deane had a strong connexion in the place, in which he was already established, and was enabled to form a considerable party against him, among his friends and acquaintances. He was a native of the village, and Willis was a stranger, whom adverse circumstances had prevented from interesting the more affluent of its inhabitants, during the period of his residence in Mr. Deane's family.

Roger Deane complained loudly "that it was a hard thing that a practice which had belonged to his own family for three generations, should now be disputed with him by one who had served his surgical apprenticeship with his father," and talked largely of "Anthony's ingratitude for favours received from himself." Of course, he found many who sided with him on the occasion.

Anthony Willis, who imagined all the world would applaud his conduct, and unite in supporting the friend of the widow and fatherless, had the mortification of finding himself attacked and insulted in more than one quarter; and, although his motives were of the purest and noblest description, yet were they canvassed, misrepresented, and distorted in a manner that almost irritated him beyond reason, and would have induced a person less firm and

independent than himself to have quitted a place in disgust where he was so little appreciated and understood. But Anthony was conscious that, in acting as he had done, he had made a meritorious sacrifice of his own interests, and resolved to persevere in spite of all obstacles, and in defiance of the invidious conduct of those who were incapable of magnanimity like his own.

"I fight a hard battle," he would say, "but I fight in a good cause, and I trust that my efforts will ultimately be successful; and, if I fail, I have the approbation of my own heart to console me."

Mrs. Deane, having been accustomed to tuition, opened a day-school for young ladies, and was, with the assistance of Matilda, who soon became very useful to her, enabled to increase their narrow income materially, by this means.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE years of hardships and trials had been weathered by the surgeon's widow and her little family, through the generous assistance of her son, by adoption, as Anthony Willis loved to style himself, when a sudden and unexpected

change took place in the prospects of Matilda, whose grandfather, though he had refused to see or acknowledge her as a descendant, during his life, yet, on his death bed, left her the sole heiress of his large fortune, but subject to the control and guardianship of his brother, with whom he willed for her to reside, till she should have completed her one-and-twentieth year.

Matilda was in the agonies of hearing the most incorrigible dunce in the school her lesson for the tenth attempt, when her uncle's letter, announcing the death of her grandfather and the conditions of his will, arrived; also directing her to hold herself in readiness to commence her journey to the North the following week, in the course of which a travelling carriage and a confidential female servant would arrive, to convey her to Goldthwaite Hall, his residence, and her future home.

This intelligence, which was enough to have turned the brain of any other girl of sixteen wild with joy, filled the heart of Matilda with feelings the very reverse of pleasurable. The colour faded from her cheek as she read what she deemed a sentence of banishment from all that was dear to her. She put the letter into Mrs. Deane's hand, and throwing herself into her arms, burst into a flood of tears.

Mrs. Deane almost dreaded to peruse a letter

which had occasioned such unwonted agitation to the recipient, yet when she did so her eyes brightened with pleasure at the intelligence of Matilda's good fortune, and leading her into another room, she gently chid her for the distress she had manifested; and congratulated her most affectionately on the happy alteration in her prospects.

"Call it not happy, my dear mamma," sobbed Matilda, throwing her arms about her neck; "what wealth or grandeur could ever compensate to me for a separation of years from you and the children, and from Anthony—from Mr. Willis I should say," she added, correcting herself with a blushing countenance, as she encountered the eyes of the young surgeon, who had been reading unobserved, in a light recess of the room, fitted up with bookshelves, which he called his study, and now advanced towards them, with his book half closed in his hand.

"So, *Miss Deane*, I am to be Mr. Willis now you have become an heiress, I find," said he, half reproachfully, half playfully, for he still regarded her as a child, though her tall, graceful form had already attained to the full height and fair proportions of womanhood—and feelings the very reverse of childish had prompted the youthful maiden to correct the familiar fondness with which she had named the beloved companion of her early days.

Matilda had long been conscious that she had arrived at the dignity of a young woman; nor was she wholly unaware of her claims to the title of a pretty one; and she had been rather anxious to discover whether Anthony Willis had arrived at the same conclusion. The anguish of heart which she felt at the idea of a separation first informed her that her affection for him had assumed a very different character from infantine attachment. She felt in a terrible fright lest he should discover it also, and while she deemed it necessary to put an immediate constraint on her words, looks, and manners towards him, she was keenly alive to the slightest semblance of coldness on his part. The title of "Miss Deane" filled her eyes with tears, and she said, almost resentfully,

"I did not think you would have called me 'Miss Deane,' when we are about to be separated for so many years—perhaps for ever."

"No, no, not so bad as that, my sweet girl, six years are not an eternity," returned Anthony, attempting to draw her to his bosom, in his usual caressing way; but, for the first time in her life, Matilda resisted his fondness and that too with some appearance of disdain, as she replied,

"Oh! I have no doubt, *sir*, the time appears as nothing to you. Perhaps you are even glad to be ridded of me," and overcome by the

bitterness of this supposition, she threw herself into the arms of Mrs. Deane, and sobbed passionately.

Anthony Willis looked grave, and taking her hand, said, "Matilda, is this real distress? or is it that you consider the change in your fortunes calls for a sudden alteration in your manner to your friends?"

"*You* do not think thus despicably of your poor Matilda, my dear, dear mamma, I hope," said the weeping girl, pressing closer to the maternal bosom of Mrs. Deane.

"Silly child, how needlessly you are distressing yourself," said Mrs. Deane, parting her rich clustering ringlets, and kissing her fair brow.

"My dear mamma," said Matilda, very earnestly, "I am no longer a child, though Mr. Willis thinks proper to treat me as such. I am taller than yourself, I shall be seventeen in less than five months, and when I opened the door for Lord Marlivale and Counsellor Etheridge the other day, they both called me 'Madam!'"

"Very convincing proofs of the legitimacy of your claims to the dignity of womanhood, upon my word, Miss Deane," said Anthony Willis, surveying the blooming girl with a saucy glance. "I cry your mercy for having omitted the ceremonial titles of address, which you appear to consider due to your mature years."

Matilda glanced resentfully at him from beneath her shadowy eyelashes, but perfectly regardless of her displeasure, Anthony resumed,

“Well, *madam*, since that is the title that pleases you—”

“You are very unkind to tease me, when you see me thus distressed,” said Matilda, weeping afresh.

“But wherefore should you be distressed, my darling girl?” demanded Anthony, with his wonted kindness.

“How can I be otherwise than afflicted at a change that will separate me from the home of my childhood, and the beloved friends who are all the world to me?” said Matilda sorrowfully.

“You are wrong to dwell on the dark side of the picture only,” said Anthony. “You should rather reflect with gratitude on the many advantages you will obtain at the cost of a temporary separation from those who are, of course, the objects of your undivided regard.”

“I know of nothing which can by any means compensate me for such an estrangement,” rejoined Matilda, sighing.

“Nay,” returned Anthony, “will you not gain new friends, a more splendid home, and the opportunity of acquiring those elegant

accomplishments which form so graceful a part of female education? and, above all, will you not in all probability be enabled to form an advantageous establishment for life, which you know, my dear, you have no chance of doing here?"

"I do not understand your meaning, sir," said Matilda, colouring deeply.

"I doubt you are wilfully blind to it," replied Anthony, laughing, "that you may enjoy the pleasure of hearing, in explicit terms, that you will in due time have lovers from among whom you may, if you choose discreetly, select a rich, as well as a worthy man, for your husband."

"No, indeed!" replied Matilda, who was more hurt than words can express, at this sage matrimonial advice from him. "I hate men, and never mean to marry."

"Oh, I dare say not!" responded Anthony, laughing again; "all girls of seventeen hate men, and talk of dying old maids, only because they entertain secret fears that such should be their ultimate destiny, malgre all the pains they take to prevent it. But courage, Matty, there is no reasonable cause for your holding such language, for I never heard of such a thing as a girl with twenty thousand pounds, and passing fair withal, being doomed to a life of single blessedness, *notens volens*."

"If such be my choice, Mr. Willis, I hope I may be permitted to please myself," rejoined Matilda, casting down her eyes with an air of infinite disdain. The personal compliment he had paid her had not reconciled her to the brotherly freedom with which he persisted (most impertinently, she considered) in discussing her matrimonial chances. But Anthony, who had not a suspicion that her regard for him was in the slightest degree tinctured with the romantic, continued to dispense his advice to her on the subject of her future marriage with the gravity of a man of fourscore, till Matilda, unable to bear it any longer, made a hasty retreat from the room with her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I cannot imagine what is the matter with that child," said Anthony, casting a look of some perplexity at Mrs. Deane, who just then re-entered, having dismissed her scholars with the joyful grant of a half-holiday. "I protest," continued he, "that were it not that she is so very a child, I could fancy that she had taken the whim into her head of falling in love with some one."

"Is that so extraordinary a fancy for a girl of seventeen to indulge in?" said Mrs. Deane, smiling.

"Upon my word, I have spent so little time in observations on the fancies of very young ladies, that I confess I am not a competent judge of such matters," said Willis; "but this I must say

I never should have suspected our mild, sensible, discreet Matty of such folly ; and indeed, my dear madam, you ought to have guarded her against such unwholesome sentimentality in its first indications."

"My dear Anthony, I was as short-sighted as yourself in this matter, and never should have dreamed that such a feeling existed in Matilda's bosom, had not her behaviour to you just now opened my eyes."

"I am at a loss," said Anthony, "to imagine for whom she can have conceived a predilection, nor can I think of any one with whom she has had the opportunity of the slightest association, unless it be with Clement Fairfax, the handsome young writing master, who has a romantic name, is vastly sentimental and obliging to all the young ladies, mends pens for Matilda, and writes verses in her album in the fairest of all running hands, headed with ornamental text. Oh ! it can be no one else."

"Unless it be yourself," rejoined Mrs. Deane, with an arch smile.

"Myself, nonsense ! she would as soon think of falling in love with her half-brother, Roger Deane," he replied, colouring ; "besides, my dear madam, I am growing absolutely venerable—turned of eight-and-twenty, quite past the age of the *beau ideal*, I assure you."

"Every one may not be of that opinion," said

Mrs. Deane, glancing at the fine figure and handsome intelligent countenance of her young friend.

Anthony shook his head. "I assure you," returned he, "that I am the very person whom a girl of seventeen would call a prodigiously ugly fellow. And the idea that any one whom I have nursed on my knee from her babyhood, almost, and instructed in the mysteries of the criss-cross-row, and the pence table, should think of falling in love with me, is too ridiculous. Cupid has not such an anomaly in all his chronicles. I tell you, my dear madam, that Clement Fairfax is the enamorado, and no one else, and I will go and administer some serious admonitions to Matilda, on the subject of so unsuitable a *penchant*."

"Unless you desire to put such a fancy into her poor little head, it will be your most prudent plan to do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Deane, "for even supposing the predilection existed, it would only have the effect of strengthening and confirming it, by rendering that a matter of importance, which, if unnoticed, would speedily be forgotten or superseded."

"Assuredly," said Anthony, "I will do nothing in opposition to your better judgment, especially as I have no further interest in the business than that which affection for Matilda gives me, since she is neither a sister nor a niece of mine."

How much more she might, at a future period, become to him, Mrs. Deane did not even hint, for though she had always contemplated the probability of a union between these two with considerable pleasure, and it was one of the few castles in the air she had ever ventured to build, yet she felt that there would be an impropriety in starting such an idea, in the present stage of the business, since she was peculiarly situated with both parties, and she thought it very possible that Matilda's relations might accuse her of endeavouring to discharge her own obligations to Anthony Willis, at her step-daughter's cost, if she took any steps that might look like bringing about a match between him and the young heiress.

CHAPTER VII.

THE arrival of the splendid equipage, destined to convey Matilda from her native village to the residence appointed for her during the residue of her minority, occasioned very considerable feelings of wonder, admiration, and curiosity in all beholders; and the unexpected change in the fortunes of the hitherto unnoticed girl, furnished a theme of conversation for all

the Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Grundys in the neighbourhood, who were literally burning with fuss on the occasion, and overflowing with "only thinks," and "who would have thought its?" and many other exclamations of equal wisdom, which they deemed suitable comments on such a marvel.

Nor were there wanting those, among the shameless worldlings of the place, who, though they had never bestowed a kindly look or word upon the friendless orphan in the days of her adversity, yet deemed it vastly proper to pester her with what they styled marks of attention, and offers of service, now they were aware she required nothing of the kind.

All which was a great inconvenience and hindrance to Mrs. Deane, in her preparations for Matilda's journey, and a source of infinite vexation to the object of their tardy and now undesired attention, as it abridged the few opportunities which remained of confidential conversation with Mrs. Deane, and absolutely deprived her of a farewell interview, in private, with Anthony. That disappointment was the more poignant to Matilda, as she had reckoned upon it with a lover's anxiety, and to be deprived of it by the impertinent intrusions of people who had hitherto treated her with the most absolute neglect and indifference, appeared to her intolerable.

Anthony had remained at home the whole

of the morning too, which was rather an unusual circumstance, but while she was impatiently counting the moments till the last of her unwelcome visitors should take their departure, he was hastily summoned away by a special messenger to one of his best patients, who had met with a dangerous accident. It was a case that admitted of no delay.

The duties of his profession were, with the young surgeon, paramount to every other consideration, and he instantly obeyed the call without tarrying to take a more particular leave of Matilda than the following brief adieu: "Good bye, Matilda; Good bless you! If I should not return in time to see you again, be a good girl, and take care of yourself, and let us hear from you whenever you have an opportunity."

What a farewell for a love-sick girl to receive from the object of her affections! Matilda wept with mortification, as she mentally repeated,

"'Be a good girl and take care of yourself, and let us hear from you whenever you have an opportunity!'" Why, he would have said as much to little Charlotte, or Lawrence, if they had only been going to boarding school for half a year. And is it thus we part, Anthony Willis?" But then she suddenly recollected that Mrs. Perkins and her two daughters, and the Misses King, were present, and exerting to the utmost their optical and oral powers to catch whatever

might pass between them, in order to retail their observations far and wide.

"How unreasonable I am," she sighed; "what more could he say before those odious worldly-minded people?" She made an unceremonious retreat, feeling herself unequal to the task of preserving even a semblance of politeness, in her present state of feeling.

It was not till all her preparations were completed, and the carriage and servants were at the door, in readiness for her departure, that Matilda resigned the hope of seeing Anthony again, and even after this she still persevered in finding a succession of excuses for delay, but in vain, for he was detained by the critical state of his patient, and Mrs. Deane was at length obliged to exert all her influence to induce her to go without beholding him once more. She had already far exceeded the hour at which her uncle had directed that she should commence her journey, for which he had given very particular instructions both to the servants and by letter to herself; yet it was with the greatest difficulty that she was at length prevailed on to enter the carriage, after taking a tearful farewell of her amiable step-mother and the children, who were all loud in expressing their admiration of "the beautiful coach in which sister Matty was going."

It was the first time Matilda had ever occupied

a seat in such a vehicle, but perfectly regardless of a circumstance which some girls would have considered as an epoch in their histories, and reckless of the exaltation it was to her in the eyes of her neighbours, she threw herself back, and covering her face with her handkerchief, gave vent to the feelings of regret, disappointment, and grief that oppressed her heart.

We will not follow the young heiress on her northern journey, nor enter into the particulars of her meeting with her uncle, who was a cold-hearted, consequential old gentleman, from whom she neither expected nor received much affection.

Mr. Harrington, indeed, considered that all the duties of a guardian consisted in engaging an accomplished ladylike woman for her governess, and providing the most approved masters of every description to assist in completing her education; in paying due attention to the improvement of her property; and above all, in preventing her from corresponding with her stepmother, or Anthony Willis, whose names he would not tolerate, forgetful that, but for their disinterested kindness and compassion, the young heiress of his ancient family, and the last of his race, might have perished in her infancy, or fallen into the most abject distress, after her father's death.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE name of the beloved absentee was meantime, in the humble home whence she had been transplanted, a spell with which Mrs. Deane and her family charmed to rest the busy cares and anxieties that beset them on every side. These appeared to increase with each succeeding year; sickness, death, entered their dwelling. Mrs. Deane had to weep over the graves of two of her children, and, while an additional outlay was required for the survivors, her means became more and more inadequate to the purpose of meeting fresh expenses.

She had severely felt the loss of her cheerful assistant Matilda, both in the household and the school; the latter, indeed, she was at length compelled to relinquish, on account of her own ill health; its hard-earned, but certain profits were greatly missed from her narrow income, notwithstanding the assistance she received from Willis, whose life was a series of exertions and self-denial. True, he had succeeded in establishing a very high reputation in his profession, and obtaining a more than equal share in the practice of Woodfield and its vicinity; still, it was, at the best, but village practice; the sphere of his exertions was con-

tracted; and many of his patients were among the poor, who often received relief from his scanty purse instead of contributing to its contents. The pleasure of having alleviated their sufferings was in too many cases his only compensation for the attendance and medicine he had bestowed upon them.

This, however, would not keep the wolf from his own door, and Anthony Willis continued a necessitous man. He lamented poverty, not on his own account, for his wants were few, but those of the widow and her children pressed sorely upon him. The eldest boy he had taken into the surgery, to initiate him into the medical profession; the second he had placed at a respectable school in the neighbourhood; the youngest, with the two girls, remained under their mother's tuition.

Mrs. Deane's eldest daughter Charlotte had already entered her teens, without any better prospect in life than the hard and precarious destiny of a governess in a private family, or a teacher in a school. The anxious widow felt all the sorrows of her own youth renewed when she contemplated such a lot for her daughter, and the time was fast approaching when it would be necessary to place Charlotte as an articled assistant in a large boarding school in London. The lady at the head of the establishment had formerly been a fellow-

assistant with herself, in the school whence Mrs. Deane had married, and she had, for the sake of old remembrances, consented to receive Charlotte, and instruct her in the requisite accomplishments and routine of duties, at a much lower premium than was usually done. Mrs. Deane was thankful for the opportunity thus presented of placing her girl in a position to struggle for her future maintenance. Of the probable bitterness of such a struggle she had had painful personal experience, and she observed with sorrow that Charlotte's timid and sensitive disposition would but ill qualify her to contend with the difficulties and mortifications which, too commonly, attend such probations.

Anthony Willis entered into all these anxieties no less keenly than the tender mother herself. With the pressure of so many claims upon his time, his sympathy, and his purse, it is not wonderful that he should have had no thought for matrimony. The season of his youth was gone; it had been past in unprecedented toils and exertions which had marked their traces in legible characters on his broad open brow; but he was still in the very prime and glory of manhood, and retained the flattering appellation of the handsome doctor, by which he had, in earlier days, been distinguished by the ladies of Woodfield and its vicinity. To these it appeared

singular that he had never paid his addresses to any one, for there were few among them who would have felt disposed to frown upon the suit of such a wooer.

Anthony, however, had never contemplated such a proceeding; the widow and orphans of his late master were to him in the place of wife and children.

Without being either a husband or a father, he was oppressed with the cares and anxieties of both, and feelings of a very painful nature would cloud his brow whenever he reflected on the possibility of his being removed from them, before they were enabled to struggle for their own maintenance. His thoughts would on such occasions naturally revert to the distant Matilda as their future protectress, when she should become the uncontrolled mistress of her own property.

That period was near at hand, yet with the hopes that attached themselves to her idea, fears and doubts would be occasionally mingled, for, aware of the instability of youthful affections, he would not place too firm a reliance on principles, which, however carefully implanted, had never been tried. It was very possible that the estrangement of nearly five years, the temptations of the world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the allurements of pleasure, might have choked the good seed which had been sown

in her heart. And he failed not to caution the sanguine widow and her children against indulging in expectations which might perhaps end in disappointment.

They were, he perceived, not only reluctant to listen to him, but disposed to repel his suggestions with absolute indignation, for his warning cast a very unseasonable damp on their joyful feelings when they met together, to celebrate, with a little feast and no small rejoicings, the day on which Matilda completed her twenty-first year.

“The warning voice that is raised against the flatteries of the syren Hope is never welcome, I am aware,” observed Anthony, “and far be it from me to suspect our darling Matty of aught that is unworthy; only I beseech you not to indulge in anticipations that may never be realised by her. In fact, my young friends, we are commanded by Him who is all sufficient to those who rely on His fatherly care, not to put our trust in a frail fallible creature of flesh, like ourselves, but rather to seek His blessing upon our endeavours to do our duty in that state of life unto which it hath pleased Him to call us.”

These words recurred involuntarily to all parties concerned when the post, on the following day, brought not the letter which Mrs. Deane had anxiously expected from her step-daughter.

Another, and another day succeeded, and still it did not arrive. Anthony made no comment on their disappointment, but when some of the elder children exclaimed against the unkindness of this neglect, he said, "Condemn no one hastily; Matilda has never given you any reason to doubt either her affection for you, or her gratitude to your mother, and as yet you know not from what cause her silence may proceed."

While he was yet speaking, a travelling carriage drove up to the door, and Mrs. Deane, with an exclamation of joy, hastened to receive and welcome the long absent daughter of her affections. The children followed her in an eager train, each emulous to obtain the first kiss, but they drew back in some awe at the appearance of the elegantly dressed, beautiful, and distinguished-looking young woman, who descended from the carriage with a grace and dignity that astonished even Anthony, who had advanced to tender his assistance in the same frank and brotherly manner as he would have done in days long past.

"Dear mamma, is this grand lady our own sister Matty?" asked little Anna, the youngest of the children, doubtfully.

"Indeed, indeed she is!" replied Matilda, snatching her to her bosom, and kissing her with great affection. Then, hastening to Mrs. Deane, she cried, "My dear, dear mamma, forgive

me this surprise ! I am now my own mistress and have come home to you at last," and after exchanging a fond embrace with her, she returned with warmth the caresses and affectionate greetings of her brothers and sisters, who gathered eagerly about her, exclaiming, "Sister Matty, our own sister Matty, has come home to us again."

"There is another friend, Miss Deane, who is no less delighted to see you, although he plainly perceives that you have neither a glance nor word of recognition to bestow on him," said Anthony Willis, with some degree of pique, both in his looks and manner.

Is it possible that any one whom I have taken the pains of acquainting with the previous state of Matilda's feelings towards the companion of her early days, can for a moment suppose that such an omission on her part could proceed from negligence or forgetfulness ?

Should there, however, be those among my readers who may be so ignorant of the heart of woman as to imagine that this was the case, truth obliges me to undeceive them, by confessing that there was a spice of something nearly allied to coquetry in her proceedings, not perhaps wholly inexcusable when we recal the scene that took place the day previous to her quitting Woodfield. Matilda had not forgotten Anthony's manner on that occasion, nor the matrimonial

advice with which he had favoured her, and while feminine delicacy taught her to blush at the emotions she had then betrayed, she secretly resolved that her conduct, at her first meeting with him, should be so totally the reverse from what it had been at their parting, as to leave no room for either himself or any one else to suspect the state of her affections. Those affections had been eagerly sought by many, but no one had been able to alienate them from him whom time and absence had only rendered dearer to the heart of the young heiress.

It generally happens that those who act a part they do not feel, act unnaturally and displeasingly. Thus it was with Matilda, who unwittingly assumed the appearance of indifference, which had the effect of wounding the feelings, and offending him, whom of all the world she most desired to please. But people in love very rarely conduct themselves rationally, and are, with very few exceptions, perpetual tormentors, not only of themselves, but every one around them.

CHAPTER IX.

ANTHONY WILLIS, notwithstanding his mortification at the reserve and coldness with which Matilda treated him, soon gave unequivocal symptoms that he was getting into the like state. He grew pensive, thoughtful, and abstracted; he gave utterance to things which he did not mean to have said; and left unsaid the things he intended to have spoken. He read with his book upside down, brushed his hat the wrong way, and was, in short, guilty of so many extravagances of omission and commission, that no love-crazed youth of nineteen ever exceeded him in absurdity; but the worst blunder of all was, he got into a sad habit of quarrelling with Matilda, instead of playing the wooer, and doing his best to please her.

Matilda, for her part, considered it perfectly requisite to shape her conduct by his, in order to keep up her maidenly dignity, and the consequence was they were eternally at cross purposes, and addressing each other by the ceremonious titles of "Sir," and "Madam," and "Miss Deane," and "Mr. Willis," when it should have been "dear Anthony," "sweet Matilda," and all the pretty names in Cupid's vocabulary.

Mrs. Deane had enough to do at times to prevent an open rupture, by endeavouring to compose the differences that daily arose between the loving pair, till at length, seeing some reason to fear that these perpetual misunderstandings would lead to their final separation, she one day interrupted them, in the very midst of a quarrel, with these words,

“A stranger who should chance to witness your mutual pouts, resentings, and pretty disdains, would doubtless consider you a pair of very oddly behaved people. But in what light, think you, must all this appear to one so perfectly aware of the state of your affections as you have respectively rendered me?”

It is impossible to conceive a more pitiable state of confusion than that into which both were thrown by this observation, nor is it possible to decide which of the twain blushed most deeply.

“Oh, mamma!” “Oh, madam!” were their mutual exclamations; but neither had power to articulate another syllable in this overwhelming embarrassment.

“And oh, Anthony!” and “Oh, Matilda!” rejoined Mrs. Deane, laughing; “do not you think I must be weary of acting the confidante and discreet third person to such a pair of incorrigible affront-hunters and self-tormentors as yourselves? I have indulged you for rather

longer than a reasonable period in your mutual heroics, and now I think it is high time for you to put an end to your nonsense, and come to a right understanding."

So saying, she withdrew.

There is not a situation more truly embarrassing to both parties than when two people are left *tête-à-tête*, by an obliging third person, with an intimation that the best thing they can do is to make love to each other.

For the first five minutes after Mrs. Deane had withdrawn, Matilda pursued her work with laudable industry, and Anthony began to apply himself very seriously to the useful occupation of transferring the rose-coloured silk from her ivory reel to one of his own fingers, in profound silence.

Matilda was so cruel as to deprive him of his plaything, by intimating that she had occasion for that very reel of silk, though she had four of the same colour in her work-box before her.

Anthony resigned it with a deep sigh. That sigh had no reference to the reel of rose-coloured silk.

The next thing Matilda did was to drop her scissors, on purpose to oblige him with the opportunity of picking them up, and handing them to her.

To do Anthony justice, he performed this

little act of gallantry with the promptness and grace of a gentleman. Perhaps he detected the manœuvre, and received encouragement from it. Matilda sighed in her turn when she received the scissors, and dropped them again, but this time it was decidedly by accident.

She apologised for her awkwardness, in some confusion. Their eyes met, and Anthony, in reply, said more than enough to make up for his long silence.

It will readily be surmised that his sayings were very favourably received by the fair heiress, but further deponent reporteth not, having rather a dislike to recording love scenes, which, albeit the most interesting things in life to the parties concerned, are interesting to no one besides. Suffice it to add that the marriage of Anthony Willis and Matilda Deane followed, as matter of course.

Anthony Willis did not, however, on becoming unexpectedly the possessor of an affluent and lovely wife, forsake a profession to which he was both enthusiastically attached, and essentially beneficial to his fellow creatures, but rejoiced in the opportunity thus afforded him of gratifying his honourable desire of removing to a more enlarged sphere of action, where his talents had free scope. And these have, in the sequel, obtained for him a distinguished rank among the most distinguished of his contempo-

raries, in a metropolis, celebrated above all others for the skill and eminence of its surgical and medical professors.

I shall add a few words for the information of those who may feel any curiosity respecting the destinies of the first family of Mr. Lawrence Deane.

The envy which the eldest son, Roger, felt at the good fortune of his rival, Anthony Willis, was in some measure counterbalanced by the satisfaction he felt in consequence of being relieved from the task of competing with so formidable an opponent in the field of *patient* contest.

Whether, however, he were over-fatigued in mind and body by the unwonted exertions to which he was summoned, through his great and sudden increase of practice, or he were guilty of the imprudence of taking some of his own prescriptions, I know not; but this is certain, he died within a month after the departure of his rival. His brother, who succeeded him in his situation, having contracted habits of intemperance, and formed a matrimonial alliance with his housekeeper into the bargain, met with no encouragement in his profession, and at length sunk into the most abject poverty. Hannah and Martha Deane, remained spinsters, but not from choice, neither did they "live in single blessedness," being devoid of those qualities which render maidenhood a free,

happy, and holy state, for they were hateful to their neighbours and hated one another. They quarrelled every day, on the score of their persecutions of Matilda in her childhood, each accusing the other as the person who had been the cause of forfeiting, for both, the advantage of living with their rich sister, or at any rate being her occasional visitors in the gay metropolis, and sharing in her bounties with their father's third family, since they were related to her in as near degree of blood. But the ties of blood, powerful as they are, when cemented by the sweet exercises of affection and reciprocal kindness, are of little force where this has never been the case.

If the elder Misses Deane had testified any desire of renewing their intercourse with her, Matilda would, doubtless, without weighing their motives too closely, have met their advances as became a sister and a Christian, and submitted to the occasional penance of their society, but they spared her that annoyance.

In conclusion—for it is meet we should end as we began, with the surgeon's widow—Mrs. Deane enjoyed the happiness of passing the residue of her days in peace and competence, surrounded by her hopeful family, and receiving continual proofs of the affectionate esteem and gratitude of the now affluent objects of her former benevolence, Anthony and Matilda Willis, who never per-

mitted themselves to forget the obligations they owed her. Those benefits they were now enabled to repay, both to her and hers with interest, and Mrs. Deane had ample reason to remember the ancient moral adage,

“A GOOD TURN IS NEVER LOST.”

IX.

MABEL GREY.

CHAPTER I.

MANY a tourist and topographer has taken up his parable against Suffolk as a county proverbially deficient in those bold and striking features which give sublimity to a landscape, and in which alone they, perhaps, consider the true picturesque to consist; and, with all my East-Anglian prejudices and partialities about me, I may not venture to contest the point. I will only ask the lover of quiet home-scenes where he will find a district richer in pastoral beauties than this very Suffolk? It is, in sooth, a land of grass, waving woods, and pleasant streams; abundant corn-fields, white cottages, and fruitful gardens—nay, the whole county, in the sweet season of spring, is one continuous garden, and every hedgerow is a bower of hawthorn and eglantine. But I shall transgress the bounds of time and space, if I permit myself to dwell on the charms

of my own sweet county, whose refreshing memory returns upon me amidst the heat, the dust, the glaring sunshine of the bustling metropolis, like a dream of Eden—so I will say nothing of its verdant banks bestarred with primroses and gemmed with bluebells, its cow-slipped meads, and those delicious briar-roses which; in this merry month of June, are waving their blossomed streamers from every bush and brake, lest I should be tempted to forsake the dingy square where I am at present sojourning, and return to luxuriate amongst them.

“But,” interrupts the saucy familiar friend who has just peeped over my shoulder, “is there not a garden with trees and flowers in this very square, of which you are making such disqualifying mention?”

Yes, truly, a garden which reminds one of a blackbird’s wicker cage, through the bars of which some kind soul has woven a few pieces of groundsel, to make the hapless prisoner fancy himself among his native groves once more. Trees, indeed, there are, but they are brown trees, not green, for their leaves are great-coated with dust; and, as for the flowers, they look as if they were sick of growing there—poor things! I should pity them more though, if they had ever grown in the country, especially if they had been transplanted from the fertile garden of Ashendale mill, in the pastoral vale of the Waveney.

Dost thou know it, gentle reader? No, I fear thou dost not, unless thou chance to be a native of dear Suffolk, and then thou wilt recognize the spot at once, and recall the very music of the mill-stream, as it sung to thee its pleasant song in days past, when reposing in Mabel Grey's rustic chair after thy summer evening ramble in the flowery meads of Ashendale.

If so, thou hast perchance seen Mabel Grey herself, "the miller's lovely daughter," when she came to fill her earthen pitcher at the sparkling stream, and she has haply proffered to thy thirsty lip a welcome draught of the pure element, with a meek and modest grace that must have reminded thee of the courtesy of the patriarchal times, when the fair Rebecca of Holy Writ gave the steward of her future father-in-law water from her own pitcher, and scorned not to administer to the wants of his weary camels with her own hand.

But Mabel Grey—ah! Mabel Grey, was the unconscious magnet that drew many a village youth to this very spot, anxious to catch a glimpse of her fair face, or a glance from her dove-like eye, in spite of the surly old miller, her father, who was reported to be rich, and who guarded his only child with jealous care from all adventurous lovers of whatsoever degree.

Nathan Grey was a stern sectarian too, and, according to the strictness of the tenets he had

embraced, forbade sweet Mabel from mixing in village sports and pastimes, or associating with thoughtless young people of her own class. He interdicted her also from the vain adornments of beads, of ribbons, of braided hair, and all the other auxiliaries to beauty, so much affected by pretty maidens in their teens; but Mabel cared for none of these things; she even submitted, with a good grace, to the tyrannous injunction, which prescribed the concealment of her luxuriant dark hair beneath a little puritanical-looking cap, with deep muslin borders, without so much as a single bow of ribbon to take from its plainness. She was a good girl, and believed everything that her father told her about the sinfulness of dress, and the vanity of outward comeliness.

She knew she was fair—what pretty girl can remain in ignorance of that fact? Besides, her soldier-cousin, George Wolfe, had often told her so: but then she considered beauty as a snare, and never dreamed of valuing herself upon so frail and adventitious a possession; and, if she had imagined that George regarded her for her personal attractions, she would not have loved him so well as she did. She ought not to have loved him at all, if she had paid the same dutiful attention to all her father's commands as she did to his injunctions respecting dress; for he had sternly interdicted her from holding any inter-

course with her cousin George, whom he branded with the injurious appellation of a "wild, godless, reprobate;" and in reply to Mabel's anxious inquiry of his reason for so styling him, he could only answer, "He is a soldier, and all soldiers are worthless profligates."

The reproach was untrue; and though Mabel did not venture to combat the harsh assertion, she felt its injustice in her heart and with all her heart. It was during the long peace, when soldiers were little honoured by the world at large, because their services were no longer needed; but Mabel could not forget that this very peace was purchased by those brave men, who had shed their best blood in the service of their country, and endured every species of hardship and privation on a foreign soil, to keep the horrors of war at a distance from their native land.

"Our hearths and our altars remain inviolate, and our boasted laws and liberties are still our own," would Mabel whisper to herself with a kindling cheek—"and why? Because our soldiers have valiantly preserved them to us, at the risk of their own lives, and at the sacrifice of all those comforts which others enjoy, without considering to whom they are indebted for them. Surely those must have cold ungrateful hearts who can speak against soldiers."

But Mabel was doomed to hear not only

soldiers, but the very soldier who was the dearest object of her affections, spoken against constantly; and, I think, notwithstanding the pain it caused her to find her father the loudest on these occasions, she loved her cousin George only the better for it; since the colour of his coat appeared to be the principal crime with which his worst enemies could charge him. Yes, he had another which in her father's sight she was aware would be inexcusable—his attachment to the Church.

There is something very impressive in the manly piety of a brave man. That of George Wolfe was free from all ostentation or display; it was the simple, unaffected devotion of the heart to that God who had so often covered his head in the day of battle, turned aside the deadly ball from his bosom, and preserved him through all the perils of the murderous campaign, to be the joy, the comfort, and the support, of his widowed mother.

Brave, generous, handsome, and devoted to herself, can we blame poor Mabel very severely for loving her soldier-cousin, though his years nearly doubled her own, and her father had forbidden her ever to bestow a thought upon him? His prohibition was vain: Mabel thought of nothing else; and, though she never transgressed the bounds of filial duty so far as to meet George Wolfe by absolute appointment, yet truth compels me to admit the fact that

she came with her earthen pitcher to the stream far oftener, in the course of the day, than her household wants had ever before required, because she frequently found her soldier-cousin loitering near the spot: and then it was so natural for them to hold sweet converse together, though every time it so happened Mabel protested it must be the last, positively the last. Still she came again, and still she by accident—purely by accident—met George on the self-same spot. They had met too often there for Mabel's peace: the rose of health and youth had forsaken her cheek, and her step had lost its buoyant lightness.

The elders of the religious society to which her father belonged congratulated her on the increasing seriousness of her deportment, so suitable to the daughter of a pious person; still it seemed strange to them that she made no profession of her progressive improvement in spiritual knowledge, but on the contrary rather appeared to avoid the subject. This was the more unaccountable, because she had latterly been the object of the particular attention of their young minister, Elias Bargrave, for whom the congregation had agreed that Mabel Grey would make a very proper wife.

When this was mentioned to her father, he signified his approbation of the proposed match, adding that the thing pleased him well, and he

would mention it to his daughter, of whose consent he could not entertain a doubt. Mabel, however, had a will of her own, and when her father named the matter to her, she replied calmly, but decidedly, that she would never become the wife of the minister.

This was the first time that she had ever ventured a direct dissent from any proposition of her father's, and his anger was only equalled by his surprise at her daring to do so in an instance of so important a nature.

"I do not love Elias Bargrave," she replied, in answer to his angry demand of her reason for refusing to become his wife.

"I should be very sorry if you felt that idolatrous affection, which silly girls call love, for any man," rejoined Nathan Grey, fixing his penetrating eyes upon her face, with a look that brought the tell-tale blood into the cheek of the conscious Mabel. She turned aside to conceal her confusion and the starting tears which rushed unbidden to her eyes.

"If you dared to cherish such a feeling even for a religious person, unless sanctioned by my approbation, I should make your case a subject of lamentation and prayer for you, Mabel Grey," continued her father; "but, if you so regarded a son of Belial, I would forget that you were my only child, and, renouncing you for ever, bestow all my substance—those worldly

possessions, the report of which has attracted worldly-minded men to seek their reputed heiress to wife—I would bestow them, I say, for the maintenance of the chapel, and the support of the poor of the congregation, rather than let so undutiful a child be the better for my savings.”

The meek and usually dove-like eye of Mabel Grey could, on some occasions, assume an expression as stern and unconquerable as his own. That expression it now bore, as she turned proudly away in silence; for she would not trust her voice with the indignant reply that rose to her lips, on being threatened with the loss of things which she so little valued as the worldly possessions of her father.

CHAPTER II.

NATHAN GREY was a hard, avaricious man; his strong religious impressions availed not to correct his love of lucre, though, in all probability, they prevented his covetousness from degenerating into absolute dishonesty. Yet he was an exacting master to his servants, and a relentless creditor to his poor neighbours. One morning he harshly refused to grind the corn which

the mother of a large family had brought to the mill, without the money to pay for the grinding.

It was no patient, soul-subdued matron whom he had denied. Goody Grimmer was the mother of ten children, who were the pests and terror of the village. She was a notorious ill manager, and her naturally bad temper had been goaded to fury by the sufferings she endured and witnessed. There was a reckless desperation about her, which made her think she could not suffer more under any circumstances. Charity, when offered, she accepted ungraciously as a right; and, when offices of kindness were withheld, she treated those of whom they had been demanded with the bitterest revilings.

On the present occasion she scrupled not to execrate the hard-hearted miller as a hypocrite; and, taking up her sack, she sternly added, "It is bread, Nathan Grey—bread—which thou hast withheld from the hungry. I must, for the lack of eight pence, return with my corn unground to my ten starving children, and fill their mouths with curses instead of food—curses against thee and thine; and I pray that the mill from which the corn of the poor returns unground may never grind meal or flour again for the rich!"

George Wolfe, who had witnessed this scene, reproved Goody Grimmer for her malisons, but,

at the same time, he, in pity to the necessities of her family, put a shilling into her hand, and bade her pay for the grinding of her corn.

“Not at that mill,” she shrieked; “the mill of the extortioner and the hypocrite shall never grind corn again:” and, flinging her sack across her shoulder, she hurried with rapid step across the pathway that led to the desolate hovel where she and her children lived.

The miller was highly displeased at the circumstance of his nephew’s presuming to give money to Goody Grimmer: “it was,” he said, “rewarding her for her evil wishes against himself;” and this feeling was still rankling in his mind when he met Mabel, and reiterated his command for her to become the wife of the minister of his congregation.

“I will never become the wife of Elias Bargrave,” she repeated; “I should be guilty of a crime in the sight of God were I to do so, for I love another!”

“And dare you tell me so to my very face, undutiful girl?” exclaimed her father, sternly.

“Yes,” she replied, “for I dare not suffer you to be deceived on a point like that. I had only the alternative of explaining the state of my affections to Elias Bargrave, a young man and a comparative stranger, or to you, my beloved and till now indulgent father,” continued she, endeavouring to seek the shelter

of the paternal bosom, to conceal her tears and blushes as she spoke.

Nathan Grey thrust her rudely from him, exclaiming—“Only dare to say that the godless reprobate, George Wolfe, is the villain who has perverted you from your duty, and I renounce you for ever!”

“The nephew of my dear lost mother is neither a reprobate, nor a villain,” replied Mabel firmly.

“He is a soldier,” retorted her father contemptuously.

“True, he has shed his blood for us, both in perilous war, while we were enjoying the blessings and security of peace by our own fireside,” observed Mabel. “Besides,” she proudly added, “he has risen by his honourable and good conduct to the rank of a serjeant, and he wears a Waterloo medal.”

“Stuff and nonsense,” retorted the miller, “no child of mine shall ever wed a soldier, and of all soldiers him the least of all. I would rather see you laid in the cold grave, Mabel Grey, than behold you the wife of George Wolfe!”

“You know not how soon, my father, you may be called upon to witness the fulfilment of the alternative you prefer,” said Mabel, bursting into tears. “These cheeks have already lost the bloom of health, and these eyes are dimmed with nightly weeping!”

“And all for love of a swaggering fellow in a red coat,” interrupted her father rudely. “Go, mend thy ways, Mabel Grey, and pray to God to give thee grace to overcome thy sinful idolatries, that thou mayst become worthy to be the helpmeet for a minister of the gospel, or else thou art no child of mine, and I will regard the stranger and wayfarer before thee !”

That evening Mabel Grey met her soldier-lover, with tear-stained cheeks and swollen eyes, and, with a voice broken by sobs, suggested the expediency of a final parting.

“It will soon come to that, Mabel,” said George, sorrowfully; “my regiment is ordered to India.”

Oh, how heroically Mabel Grey had resolved upon acting, when she thought it rested with herself alone to sacrifice the fond affections of her heart upon the shrine of duty ! But when the fatal sentence met her ear, which assured her that parting was now a thing irrevocable, it seemed to her like the fearful and unexpected knell of every earthly hope. Her heart appeared to collapse with the mortal pang it brought; and when George whispered, “You will be good to my poor mother, for my sake, Mabel, when I am far away,” the colour faded from the quivering lip on which her faltering answer died away in inarticulate murmurs, and she sunk fainting on his bosom.

And thus were the sad but happy lovers detected by the angry father of poor Mabel, who, with insults and reproaches, which no other man would have dared to address to the brave soldier of Waterloo, tore the still insensible girl from his supporting arms, and carried her into the house.

That night, when all eyes, even the tearful ones of Mabel Grey, were closed in sleep, Ashendale mill was discovered to be on fire; and, being a wooden structure, the flames soon communicated to the dwelling-house, which was presently enveloped in the devouring blaze, the red light of which beacons the peaceful meadows and pastoral stream of the Waveney with a lurid brightness.

The miller was awakened from angry and disturbed dreams of his only child, by the terrific cry of "Fire!" a cry which then too frequently alarmed the once peaceful homesteads of Suffolk with midnight horrors.

The miller of Ashendale was, as I have before intimated, a hard man to the poor. He was an unpopular person with all degrees, not even excepting the religious community of which he was a member, so that he had small chance of receiving voluntary assistance in his sore distress.

Paralyzed himself at the ruin he saw impending over him, he stood, for some seconds gazing abstractedly at the roaring, rushing flames,

in which the fabric of the old mill was enswathed, till, mechanically following their fiery progress, his eye was attracted to the window of his daughter's chamber. At that very moment the casement fell in, and a volume of invading flames was impelled inward by a powerful gust of wind.

"My child—my child!—my precious Mabel! will no one save her?" he exclaimed, in a suppressed shriek of agony at this appalling sight.

"Uncle!" "Father!" "She is safe!" "I am safe; he has saved me!" was the heart-thrilling response to the appeal of the distracted father, in the mingling voices of George Wolfe and his own sweet Mabel, who, blackened with smoke, and with scorched garments, stood before him.

"Bless you—bless you both, my children!" exclaimed, or rather sobbed, Nathan Grey, enfolding them together in one fervent embrace.

The next moment something like an undefined suspicion that the conflagration had been caused by him, who had thus entitled himself to his gratitude, by saving Mabel from a fiery death, crossed his mind; but the wild fiend-like yell of Goody Grimmer, exclaiming—"Ha! ha! miller Grey, will you refuse to grind corn for the poor again?" bursting on his ear,

broke the spell, and carried conviction with it as to the true author of the mischief. The sudden disappearance of Jack Grimmer, her eldest son, an ill-disposed youth of sixteen, who had been observed lurking about the mill the preceding evening, and has not been since seen at Ashendale, afforded strong presumptive evidence that he had been the guilty instrument of his mother's revenge.

The wretched woman was seized—but why should I speak of her? Let me rather gratify my readers with the assurance of the happiness of those faithful lovers, George Wolfe and Mabel Grey, the grateful father having purchased the discharge of his nephew from the regiment, and, with his own hand, bestowed upon him at the altar her whose life he had preserved at the peril of his own.

X.

BIRD'S-EYE GREEN.

CHAPTER I.

IN the parish of Woodfield there is a spot of peculiar beauty, called Bird's-eye Green. Its name is not derived, as some of my readers may have imagined, from the extensive prospect which it commands, but from the profusion of that lovely little turf-flower, the minor Forget-me-not; termed by the unlettered East Anglian naturalist the *bird's-eye*, with which the emerald sward is in the merry month of May so gaily enamelled, that, when you glance downwards, it gleams like a bright blue carpeting beneath the spiral blades of grass.

Bird's-eye Green, when first I knew it, was a little world within itself, distinct and separate from the rest of the village. It was one of those beautiful park-like commons, which, before the rage for arable enclosures deprived the peasantry of agricultural districts of a sure stimulus for industry and economy, might be seen studded

with groups of cattle, or families of pigs and poultry, affording a smiling picture of the prosperity of the rich, and the independence of the labouring classes. It was, in fact, a real common-wealth to all the inhabitants of that parish, where the cow or pig of the humble labourer was free to share the right of pasturage with the flocks and herds of the substantial yeoman. Every cottage then sent forth its proportion of live stock to the green, under the care of some trusty urchin of the family. It was a pretty sight on sweet spring days to watch the curly-pated little cotters, each presiding over the conduct of a cow, a pig, a pet-lamb, a train of downy goslings, or a brood of turkey chicks, whichever it might chance to be, or perhaps a weanling calf just turned out to graze, yet retaining sufficient of its lactivorous propensities to render it an object of jealous suspicion to the proprietors or guardians of all the recently bereaved cows on the green.

Bird's-eye Green, although so picturesque and peaceful in its appearance, that to the eye of the casual traveller from busy noisy towns, it bore the semblance of a perfect Arcadia or fairy land, inhabited by juvenile shepherds and shepherdesses, who were not unfrequently seen garlanded with flowers, and dancing or sporting in jocund groups, was nevertheless a spot abounding in emulation, anger, and strife, in short, teeming

with all the evil passions, on a small scale, that are to be found agitating the great world, and arming nation against nation.

The proprietors of the flocks and herds, pigs and poultry, and more especially the youthful guardians to whose keeping they were consigned, had separate interests and petty jealousies, which broke out frequently in open acts of hostility and violence. Those blooming picturesque groups of children fought and scratched somewhat oftener than they danced, and scolded more than they sang. The attendant of a cow sometimes quarrelled with the guardian of goslings. The protector of a sow and pigs invaded the quiet corner where some youthful maiden of the green kept watch over her darling brood of turkey chicks, or enjoyed the company of her beloved pet-lamb; and fierce were the clamours and contentions that would follow such aggressions on the assumptive but undefined rights of the pre-occupants of favourite spots. It was a complete sample of the state of society that would exist in a genuine republic under the law of nature, every one doing that which was right in their own eyes, or wrong if they had the inclination and, at the same time, the power of accomplishing their desires without fear of punishment.

Robert Rowe and Sophy Flaxman were two of the most determined foes on the green. Sophy Flaxman was a fat, fair, blue-eyed, little vixen of

thirteen, when her parents first came to live on the green. They were considered very respectable persons in their degree, and made a great deal of money by rearing and fattening poultry for market, and selling eggs. Sophy was chiefly employed in attending to this department, and every fine day was to be seen sitting on a little turf hillock, which she called her throne, surrounded by a numerous family of dependents, hens, turkeys, ducks, and goslings—that is, I should say, whenever she was sufficiently early in the field to obtain possession of this favourite eminence, which was an object of contention among several children; and Sophy, having neither brothers nor cousins to championise her, was often driven from her position by the uncivilised natives of the soil, who regarded her as a stranger and an interloper on the green.

Sophy was better dressed and better mannered than any of her juvenile neighbours, and she evidently cherished ideas of her own superiority that gave universal offence. Her mother, when she first sent her forth on her daily vocation, strictly charged her “to form no acquaintances, much less intimacies, among them, but to take her knitting and her book in her bag, and keep herself to herself.”

This was prudent advice, but its observance rendered the damsel very unpopular on the

green, and was the means of exposing her to a variety of annoyances from the other young people, but more especially from Robert Rowe, a sturdy, sunburned imp, remarkable for his roguish black eyes and ragged gaberdine, who, more out of mischief than malice, perhaps, took great delight in teasing Sophy, and disarranging all her arrangements for the day.

Robert was the eldest of a family of eight brothers and sisters, all as rude and ragged as himself. His parents had neither cow, pig, nor poultry; they were indifferent managers, as many of the peasantry are, and for want of a little prudence and forethought lost the advantage of improving their means by availing themselves of the privilege of occupying "goings," in other words, the right of commonage, which they, as well as the other cottagers in the parish of Woodfield, were entitled to claim on Bird's-eye Green, for live stock of various kinds.

Threepence a week scrupulously set aside for half a year, would have purchased a pig, and this pig, if a young sow, would, in the course of two years, have brought a most profitable increase; but the family of the Rowes were short-sighted people, who never provided for the future.

Robert Rowe, their first-born son, was the hired keeper of a whole herd of swine belonging to a substantial farmer on the green, and

with these the youthful hog-herd lived on terms of almost brotherly affection and intimacy ; and, greatly to Sophy Flaxman's indignation, he daily led them to the spot which it was her pleasure to occupy, for the perverse amusement of putting her and her feathered followers to the rout.

Sophy did not put up with this injurious treatment tamely. She vituperated Robert and his master's pigs by every term of contemptuous meaning which might be permitted to pass lips feminine. Seconded by a pair of very potent allies, the gander and the turkey-cock, she had defended her position with the intrepidity of a Thracian Amazon, and sometimes worsted her antagonists. As for Robert's occasional overtures for a cessation of hostilities on terms of peace and good-will, she always rejected them with the most unqualified expression of scorn. "His enmity might be endured," she said, or rather intimated, "but his friendship was inadmissible."

Robert attributed this lofty language to pride, and redoubled his aggressions with the view of rendering himself a person of greater importance in her sight. Sophy would have proved a match in her retaliations for any of the provocations with which her rustic foe assailed her, but, unfortunately, her friend the turkey-cock came in for a mortal injury in one of these

diurnal encounters; and the luckless damsel, after the loss of this auxiliary, could no longer maintain her ground against Robert and his grunting attendants, who were daily becoming more formidable: so she deemed it most prudent, after suffering a complete defeat in two or three pitched battles, to retire from the contested spot, whenever Robert Rowe and his master's herd made an advance. This she did, however, with the most unequivocal gestures of disdain, commencing with one of those silent but expressive declarations of hostility and contempt, indicated by a scornful elevation of the lips and nostrils, which a Suffolk girl calls "sneering" (pronounced *snaring*) "at a person." Now, it is a well-known fact, that no Suffolk lad, from the age of three years old and upwards, can tamely brook being sneered at, as a sneer is by them considered as the most offensive of all insults. The first time Sophy began to practise this feminine art of war, Robert was more deeply hurt than if she had twitched out a handful of his chestnut curls; and he actually fled home to his mother, out of breath, and with tears in his eyes, exclaimed,

"Mother, what do you think? Sophy Flaxman have sneered at me!" To which his mother, who was in the critical act of turning the heel of a stocking, dropped a dozen stitches from her knitting-pin, at once, in her

surprise, as she replied, in a tone of lively indignation,

"Why, you don't say so, Robert?"

"Yes, but I do, mother," responded Robert; "and she is always stoning me, and calling me out of my name. I have hided her once or twice, but it arn't of no manner of use, for she is such a serpent, nobody can ever get the master of her; but I wouldn't have minded her pulling my hair, nor stoning master's pigs, nor nothing else that she has done, if she had not sneered at me."

"Well, but, Bobby dear," responded the mother, affectionately stroking down the injured curls, which, truth to tell, bore some marks of recent rough usage, "I'll tell you what I would do if I were in your place."

"What would you do, mother?" asked he, eagerly.

"Why, I would sneer at her again."

"It is of no use, mother, for I couldn't sneer like her if I tried ever so. She sneers up her mouth, and nose, and eyes, and chin, all at once, in a way that nobody else can do, 'specially a boy."

"Well, then, I wouldn't look at her."

"No more I won't," replied the indignant hog-herd, with an air of deep determination.

This resolution was made on a Saturday evening, and on the Sunday noon he communi-

cated to his sympathising mother the mortifying fact, that Sophy had sneered at him all church time.

"Why did you look at her, Robert?" asked Goody Rowe.

"'Cause I couldn't help it," responded Robert, with infinite *naïveté*. "I looked to see if she meant to sneer at me, and she did sneer, worse than ever, every time I caught her eye, even when the parson was giving out his text. And oh, dear mother, that text seemed as if it was meant on purpose for us, for it was, 'See ye fall not out by the way;' and while I was thinking how well it seemed to suit Sophy Flaxman, she sneered again, with the whole church looking on."

"Her mother make a proper *fule* of herself by keeping that *airly** mawther at home," observed the sagacious Goody Rowe, with infinite indignation; "but I suppose these Flaxmans think themselves above their neighbours, as they have such lots of eggs and fowls to carry to market every week, and we shall see that their girl, instead of going to service like other folk's children, will be kept dawdling on the green with her turkeys and geese till she gets the name of the green *guse*, herself, and you may go and tell her I say so."

* This droll but expressive East Anglian adjective, *airly*, signifies proud, haughty, literally, full of airs.

Robert took the earliest opportunity of repeating his mother's witticism to his fair adversary, in the hope of provoking something in the way of conversation, but all the reply he received from Sophy was—another sneer.

Robert at last made a pacific overture in the hope of escaping the continuation of her system of silent hostility. "You shall have your own little hill all to yourself, Sophy," said he one day, "and I won't drive master's hogs among your fowls any more, nor *hull* stones and *dodmans** at you, nor yet upset your turkeys' pan, nor kick your work-basket over, nor do nothing else to spite you, if you will leave off sneering at me, and be friends."

Sophy would not accept the terms of pacification. In fact, the list of outrages which Robert enumerated, and which had been of daily occurrence for many weeks, had left a feeling of deep resentment on the little maiden's mind. When Robert found he could not succeed in mollifying her by submissions, he once more resorted to open acts of aggression, which were met by Sophy with her accustomed indications of silent contempt.

* A snail is called in Suffolk a *dodman*. See Moor and Forbye's "East Anglian Words" for further explanation of the dialect of the Eastern Counties.

CHAPTER II.

SOPHY was growing a tall womanly girl; her rosy cheeks, blue eyes, and flaxen ringlets, set off, as they were, by the extreme neatness of her dress, and the demureness of her general behaviour, began to attract the admiration of some of the pastoral swains of her own age, on the green, and, instead of persecutions from youthful shepherds and swine-herds, she became the object of general attention and respect.

She was complimented with offerings of wild strawberries, pig-nuts, dormice, squirrels, little rabbits, and young linnets, besides flowers in abundance, and strings of birds' eggs, to the infinite envy and vexation of her female compeers; but Sophy rejected all these sylvan tributes with the same degree of feminine pride and reserve which she had exhibited at an earlier period on the green.

She had now undisputed possession of her favourite hillock; and if her only adversary, Robert Rowe, had presumed to molest her or her poultry there, he would have received condign punishment from half-a-dozen self-elected champions, who were contending to win her regard. All this became very painful to the feelings of Robert Rowe; his merry shout and careless whistle

were no longer heard on Bird's-eye Green, and one day Sophy observed that farmer Mills' hogs were under the care of another boy. The reason of this change was not long in reaching her. Robert Rowe was not happy at home, and had gone to sea, "because he did not like to stay on the green to be sneered at by a girl," he said.

Sophy Flaxman's proud heart was somewhat touched at this intelligence, and she experienced some compunctious visitings of conscience for having manifested such determined obduracy at different times, when Robert had made overtures of peace.

Goody Rowe told her "that Robert had gone to the South Seas, a long way farther than the *Ingies*, and it was all because she behaved so *ugly* to him; and now, if poor Robert were to be drowned, or swallowed by a whale, it would be all her fault, for Robert thought she despised him on account of his ragged slop (frock) and he had gone to sea, that he might have clothes she could not sneer at, if so be he lived to come home, but that, perhaps, he never would;" and then the mother lifted up her voice and wept.

Sophy went home sorrowful and self-accused that day. She wished she had not been quite so hard-hearted as to go on sneering at Robert after he ceased to tease and annoy her. The same night she dreamed that Robert was drowned at sea,

and awoke crying. A few weeks after, Robert's father was killed by a fall from a stack, and the widow and family were reduced to great distress.

Sophy had saved five shillings from some of the little perquisites of office as mistress of the poultry, and this sum, which she had destined to the purchase of a new bonnet, she carried to the widow Rowe, and entreated her to accept. There was, however, an angry degree of excitement in the mind of Goody Rowe that proved more powerful than either sorrow or the pressure of poverty; and though five shillings was at that moment like a mine of wealth, she sullenly rejected the donation from one whom she regarded as the enemy of her darling boy.

"It was all along of you that my Robert went to sea," said she, "and I would rather die of hunger than be beholden to your charity, Sophy Flaxman."

"But," said Sophy, "I am so very sorry for your misfortunes, neighbour Rowe, and it would make me quite happy if you would take this money."

"It is a fine thing to have so much money to spare, I dare say," returned Goody Rowe. "We are very poor folks, it is true, but we can live without the love, and die without the pity, of those who sneered at our Robin, because, poor dear, he hadn't such good clothes as some of his neighbours."

"Indeed," said Sophy, bursting into tears, "I am very sorry that your son and I had any quarrels, but it was he that would not let me be at peace, and every one knows how he killed our turkey-cock last May, only for taking my part."

"It may be so," replied the mother, "but it is the first time I ever heard any one speak against my poor Robert; he was the kindest-hearted, best-natured boy that ever I knew, and I shall never see him no more. He might have stayed at home to be a comfort to us all, if you had not made him weary of the green, by such ill-becoming airs."

Sophy was deeply hurt at these upbraidings, especially when she had come on so kind an errand; however, she made too much allowance for the state of mind in which she saw her unfortunate neighbour, to think of taking umbrage; but, laying the money on the table before her said,

"I am very sorry for your distress, neighbour Rowe, and also for the matter in which you think I have been to blame, and so I have, no doubt, in part; and if I can do anything for you at any time, I hope you will let me know."

She then withdrew, greatly mortified certainly at the reception with which her friendly and benevolent attempts at offering comfort and assistance had been met, yet feeling better

satisfied with herself than she had done for some time past.

Soon after these events, Sophy's mother died, just as her father had saved up money enough to take a little farm on the green. Sophy, instead of going to service, had to keep her father's house, and superintend a dairy of five cows, and a great increase of pigs and poultry. She had now such full occupation for her time and thoughts, that she seldom went out except to church and market. She was a most careful and thrifty manager, and her father bestowed a fine young heifer upon her, by way of encouragement. The milk of this cow Sophy devoted to the nourishment of the widow Rowe's destitute family, instead of laying out the produce in finery for her own personal adornment. This she did as a matter of conscience, for she received no thanks from Goody Rowe, who never saw her without upbraiding her with the absence of Robert; and the worst of it was, year after year passed away, and Robert did not return. Meantime, every thing prospered in farmer Flaxman's fields and homestead. It was a time of great agricultural prosperity, and the neighbours talked of his growing rich, and leaving Sophy a fortune. Some of her former compeers began to call her Miss Sophy, and wondered at her continuing to dress just the same as she did when she first came to the green, in a dark stuff

gown and close cottage straw-bonnet, with a plain ribbon crossed over it.

Sophy had many admirers, and some lovers ; but she preferred her father's house to any change that was offered to her, for she was perfectly happy in her home duties, and the opportunities that were permitted to her of conducing to the comfort of her parent, and alleviating the distresses of some of her poor neighbours. But for her assistance, the widow Rowe and her younger children must have gone into the workhouse.

Sophy kindly took first one of the little girls and then another, in turn, into the house to fit them for service, by instructing them in household work, and the business of the dairy and poultry yard. Any girl who understands these departments is sure to obtain a place in the country, and to receive good wages ; but the pride and the folly of the mothers of poor families not unfrequently lead them to despise the place of a dairy-maid for their daughters, and to aim at bringing them up for house-maids, dress-makers, and lady's-maids, because such persons are more showily dressed. This is a great error, for such situations are already overstocked by the daughters of mechanics and small farmers, who possess better manners, and enjoy opportunities of acquainting themselves with things requisite to be understood by upper servants.

Goody Rowe "was not," as she honestly said, "a bit obliged to Sophy Flaxman for teaching her girls to drudge after cows and pigs and poultry, for she wished them to get into higher places." Sophy knew, from experience, that it would be only waste of words to argue with a person so deaf to reason as Goody Rowe; and as the girls themselves were most anxious to profit by her advice and friendly instructions, she persevered in the good part she had taken, without regarding the ingratitude of their mother.

CHAPTER III.

ONE snowy afternoon, when Sophy and little Anne Rowe, who was at that time her assistant in the household, were arranging the butter basket for going to market, her father came into the dairy and said, "Sophy, dear, I am going to Scrapeton market this afternoon, to receive the payment from Merchant Smith for the load of wheat I sold this day week, so I can take your butter with me, and spare you and your little maid a long walk, for it is not so well for us both to be out at the same time."

Sophy assented to the propriety of this ob-

servation, and made haste to finish packing her neatly moulded pints of butter in nice order, each pint enveloped in a small square white linen cloth, with a fair damask napkin spread over the whole.

For the information of readers unacquainted with our East Anglian customs, it may be proper to explain that butter is in Norfolk and Suffolk sold by the pint, though not, as some may be deluded by the word pint to suppose, in a liquid state, but by weight, for a pint of butter is so called from having undergone the process of being squeezed very tightly into a wooden mould or measure, which will contain exactly twenty ounces. The mould in which it is made up is about eight inches in length, round, and a little larger at the mouth than at the top, but the butter when it comes out of it appears somewhat in the hour-glass form, large at each end, with a narrow waist gradually indented in circles towards the centre. Strangers who visit a Suffolk dairy are generally greatly mystified, when shown the mould used in pinting the butter, and cannot comprehend how the butter comes out a shape so different; but this is produced by the skill of the dairy woman, who indents the butter with the edges of the mould as she knocks it out. Sophy Flaxman was an adept in this art, and her butter was in great request.

The afternoon was spent in light household

operations, after which, the young mistress and her little maid made up a bright fire, and after setting out the supper comfortably, in readiness for farmer Flaxman's return, read a chapter in the Bible together, verse by verse alternately, and then employed themselves in useful needle-work till the clock struck nine. The time had passed away so quickly that both started at the sound of the ninth stroke, and Sophy expressed surprise that her father was not home. Anne rose, threw another log on the fire, cleared the grate, and swept up the hearth, while Sophy put aside the muslin blind, and, opening the casement, looked out at the night. The night was intensely cold, and a young moon laboured among dense masses of broken snow clouds, from which now and then a few feathery flakes silently descended. The ground was mantled over with a white carpeting, and the broken belt of forest trees, that had defined the boundary of the ancient park enclosure in the days when Bird's-eye Green had been the Lord of Woodfield's pleasaunce and chase, stood forth in their snowy panoply, like an army of giant spectres, against the intense darkness of the shadowy distance beyond.

"I hope no accident has happened to my father," said Sophy, as she closed the casement against a sudden chilly drift that blew full into her bosom.

"Oh, lauk, Miss, I hopes not," responded Anne; "Gypsy be a proper toward dear, and never puts on any parts; sure she'd carry master steady enough."

"I wish my father had not troubled himself with the eggs and butter," pursued Sophy. "Surely I was very wrong to let him take two baskets. We could have carried it quite well to-morrow."

"Why, Miss, as you say, we could have carried them right well, only master do think so much of making a penny a pint more for the butter, and p'r'aps butter might have dropped to-day, for folks at shop do fault the price sorely."

"I wish," said Sophy, "we had a man in the house to send to Scrapeton to meet my father."

"Miss," said Anne, "I will go and meet master myself, if you will just let Ted, the turnip boy, walk along with me for company."

While Sophy was debating in her own mind whether she would call the tired boy out of his warm bed to send him forth into the inclement night, the sound of horses' hoofs was heard pattering on the frozen ground near the stable door.

"There's my father!" cried Sophy, running to unbar the door, while Anne hastily followed with the lamp. Both uttered a cry of dismay when they opened the door, for Gypsy had

returned without her rider. Sophy, with characteristic presence of mind, took the lamp from the hand of her pale trembling little attendant, and examined the knees of the mare to ascertain if there were any marks of her having fallen, but there were none, and she then experienced alarm of another nature. It was known that her father went to receive a sum of money. The road from Scrapeton to Woodfield was very lonely, and particularly dismal on a winter night: her heart grew cold with terror as the thought occurred to her that he had possibly been robbed—perhaps murdered.

“Run, dear Anne,” said she, “to neighbour Mills, and ask him if he and his men will go with me to Scrapeton with lanterns, to see if we can discover my poor father.”

“Miss,” replied Anne, “I will with all the pleasure in life, if Teddy will get up and go with me, for I am always timoursome in the dark, and I do think it be getting for ten o’clock.”

“Well, then, if you are afraid I will go myself.”

“Oh, Miss Sophy, Miss Sophy,” cried Anne, clinging to her garments, “I dursn’t be left in the house all alone with only Teddy, and he fast asleep in the garret.”

“Rouse him up while I am gone, if you are

afraid, Anne, for I am in such agony about my dear father," cried Sophy, bursting into tears; "and something must be done."

"Oh dear, oh dear!" sobbed Anne, "you must not go, Miss Sophy. I is so afraid poor dear master has been robbed and murdered; and p'r'aps we shall all be robbed and murdered too."

"It is of no use thinking of ourselves," cried Sophy, struggling to withdraw her garments from the pertinacious grasp of the terrified child, yet reluctant to leave her in a state of such painful excitement.

While she was endeavouring to prevail upon Anne to call the lad up, a heavy step was heard approaching the house.

Sophy flew to the door. Anne ran to seek the protection of Teddy, the turnip boy, or rather to compel him to rise, and come to the rescue, in the event of an attack. Sophy, not so cautious, flung open the door, without waiting either to make inquiry or to receive a summons, and admitted a tall, athletic stranger, in a rough, shaggy great-coat, and with a formidable bludgeon in his hand.

"Have you come to tell me any news of my father?" cried Sophy, filial apprehension mastering every other feeling of alarm.

"Why, if your name be Sophy Flaxman, the same, I suppose, that used to sneer at a

poor ragged ne'er-do-well called Robert Rowe, I believe I can," returned the stranger.

"Pray, tell me," cried Sophy, "if he be safe, and where he is."

"Why the old gentleman is safe enough, only a little bit disguised, I think you call it, in something that has got above board with him at the market table, and so he couldn't manage to steer his horse on the right tack, it seems, but was shipwrecked in a quicksand of snow, where he would have foundered if I had not by good luck chanced to have been on my way towards this green, d'ye see, when I heard him singing out for help, and found him and his baskets rolling about among the snow like a ship in a storm; so I brought to, and towed him out of the snow-drift, and lent him a helping hand till we got to the next cottage, where he made port, and in good time, for his wet rigging began to freeze, and he was glad to get to the fire, while I scudded on to let you know all about it by his desire, for fear you should be scared by the horse coming home without the old lad."

Sophy was very glad to hear the matter was no worse, and after returning her grateful thanks to the young seaman for the service he had rendered her father, requested him to take a seat by the fire, while she warmed a jug of spiced elder wine for his refreshment.

"I don't care if I do," replied the stranger, "as it is the first civil thing you have ever offered to do by me, Miss Sophy."

"You speak as if we were old acquaintances, sir," observed Sophy, turning a scrutinizing glance upon her guest, who, doffing the large fur cap he had hitherto worn, saluted her with a profound bow, accompanied with a certain droll expression of countenance, which recalled to her mind a confused memory of events and scenes connected with the early drama of life.

"Robert Rowe!" she exclaimed; "can it really be you?"

"Robert Rowe, forsooth," repeated the young seaman, throwing open his rough great-coat, and displaying a suit of naval blue; "when did you ever see ragged Robin in such rigging as this, and what should make you think of him after so many long years are gone over both our heads?"

"I have thought a great deal of Robert Rowe," replied Sophy; "and it gives me great pleasure to see him once more returned to his old friends."

"Bless your sweet eyes, if I thought you were in earnest, mayhap I could tell you that I've thought a deal about one Sophy Flaxman, and wondered whether the first thing she did when she saw me, after eight years' absence, would be to sneer at a poor fellow again."

"I hope I understand my duty to my neighbour better than to act so foolishly," replied Sophy, "and, Robert, I am very glad to see you home again."

"But, I say, Miss Sophy, suppose I had come home without a penny in the locker, and my rigging as bad as it was when I slipped my cable, and left all my comrades on the green in the lurch?"

"Why, then, I should have been equally glad to see you on your own account, Robert, and perhaps more so on my own, because I should have had the opportunity of making you some amends for my former unkindness."

"Thank you, Miss Sophy, thank you very heartily for your good will, but I'm very glad I am in no need of your charity any further than a cup of hot elder wine or so to drink your good health," returned the young mariner, taking the cheering potation from the hand of his former adversary with a merry glance.

"And so you have left off sneering at your neighbours, Sophy?" continued he, after he had emptied the mug.

"I should be sorry to boast of my reformation in that way too much," retorted Sophy, with a sly smile, "lest I should relapse into my former bad practices."

"I wish you would just for once," said Robert, "that I may be sure that, for all your pretty

words and meek looks, you are the very same little vixen who used to be more than a match for me and my master's pigs."

"Not after the murder of my poor turkey-cock, remember."

"Ah, Sophy, that was well put in. But now you will acknowledge that I am an honest fellow, when I tell you I have brought you home something to make amends to you for that loss."

"A green goose, I suppose?" rejoined Sophy, turning a laughing glance upon her former foe.

"No," returned Robert, with a loving look, "but a beautiful Poll parrot, that can sing a dozen tunes, and ask you how you do—that is, if the young 'uns at mother's cottage don't stop her pipes before you see her."

"Then you have seen you poor mother?" The young mariner blushed.

"It is all your fault if I have not," said he.

"Mine?" exclaimed Sophy.

"Yes, for making me so happy with you that I could not find it in my heart to tack about and leave such a snug port. You must know I came by the Scrapeton mail, which should have got in a quarter before twelve, ante-meridian, but the deep snows have put us all aback, and we did not make our moorings at the Scrapeton Angel till past eight at night; and then I hired a horse and cart,

and shipped all my luggage aboard, and sent one of my 'prentices down with it to mother's cot. Poll in her gilded-cage is perched at the top of the load, with a blanket and a tarpaulin thrown over all, so I hope she'll take no hurt."

The entrance of Sophy's father, quite sobered, and greatly ashamed of the circumstance that had led to the accident, put an end to the conversation. Robert Rowe, after shaking hands with the farmer, and receiving the delighted greetings of little Anne, whom Sophy summoned to welcome the long absent truant, wished all parties good night, and departed in high spirits.

The next day he brought the promised token of his remembrance to Sophy Flaxman, and received a general invitation from the farmer "to come as often as he pleased to see him and his old friend Sophy."

Robert cast one of his droll glances at the damsel and received a dimpling smile in reply, with something like an attempt at one of those comical elevations of the lips and nostrils which her young neighbour was wont to take so deeply to heart.

"Ah, Sophy, Sophy, that was the making of my fortune," cried he, shaking his head at her. "If you had not taken it into your saucy little head to sneer at me so scornfully, I should

have been keeping farmer Mills' swine to this day, or tilling the land like another Cain, instead of going into the world to seek for better fortune than the grinding lot of poverty to which I was born. I am now, through patience, perseverance, and some determination, the captain of a South Sea vessel, and the next voyage will make me rich enough, if it please God to prosper me as he has done, to stock a farm, and mayhap, if I can persuade some good girl to wait so long for me, to marry a wife and settle myself happily near Bird's-eye Green, among my old friends for life."

Sophy Flaxman felt thoroughly ashamed of blushing in reply to this declaration of Mr. Rowe's intentions, especially as he did not think proper to point his allusion more explicitly to her than by one of his droll looks. He actually after visiting her every day during the three months he remained at Woodfield, and making himself very agreeable to her by his attentions, went to sea, and performed his projected voyage without a more express acknowledgment of the state of his affections.

Sophy consoled herself as well as she could for his departure, in the active performance of her duties. I will not take upon me to say that she regarded the green parrot in the light of a pledge of Robert's love, but it certainly was a great pet with her and little Anne, who

was now so indispensable to her as a help in the house, that she declared "it was impossible to part with her."

Two long years at last wore away, and then—who does not anticipate the sequel?—Robert Rowe returned, if not a rich man, yet rich enough to maintain his mother comfortably, and also a wife.

Sophy Flaxman loved him well enough to forgive the trial he had made of the strength of her affection, so he found little difficulty in persuading her to become his bride; and, she induced him to give up the trials of a sea-faring life for her sake, and to return to agricultural pursuits.

They now occupy the finest dairy farm on the verge of Bird's-eye Green.

XI.

IRMINGLAND HALL.

MY BACHELOR COUSIN'S TALE.

CHAPTER I.

I HAD once a bachelor cousin, who strongly reminded me of one of those venerable gossips of the olden time, a monkish historian. His devotion to antiquarian pursuits amounted almost to monomania, and was only equalled by his love of the marvellous. He was a believer in ghosts, witches, predictions, and charms, and had very much the appearance of a wizard. His house resembled an old curiosity-shop, and was so full of the relics of past ages, that he had scarcely room to turn himself in it. His letters were oftener dated before the era of the reformation than in the present century. If any one spoke to him of our sovereign lady the queen, his rejoinders indicated that his thoughts had carried him back to the reign of queen Elizabeth.

He would walk miles in quest of Roman

camps, British barrows, and Runic columns. I plead guilty to sending him the whole breadth of the county, on a fool's errand, more than once; but his good humour was invincible. He enjoyed a joke, even if the laugh were against himself; and he dearly loved to tell a good story, especially when he was the hero of his own tale.

One dull Christmas evening, when we were prevented from going to the annual ball at Scrapeton, by the deep snow that had rendered our bad roads impassible, our malcontent circle closed about the fire with blank looks, and regardless of the presence of our bachelor cousin, whom we generally considered it our duty to amuse, sat in unwonted silence, brooding over our disappointment. He cast a sly glance round, and seeing that none of the party appeared disposed to laugh and talk, he said, "As you all appear in a listening mood to-night, and have nothing better to do, I have some thoughts of telling you a story."

"I hope it is not about the Lacedæmonians," whispered my youngest sister, beginning to look very much bored.

"No, Miss, it is about myself," said he; "one of my queer sort of adventures with a lady."

"A lady!" we all exclaimed; "what sort of a lady?"

"One who could make herself very happy without going to balls," he replied; "but if you

wish to hear who and what she was, you had better take out your work, and listen quietly without impertinent interruptions. I do not love to have the thread of my story broken with useless questions."

We promised good behaviour, and then having quietly settled ourselves to our various occupations for the evening; we soon forgot the stupid ball at Scrapeton, while our worthy cousin related the following whimsical adventure, which he protested had befallen him about fifty years ago.

"There is an antique mansion in Norfolk, called Irmingland Hall, situate in the midst of a wild desolate common, where the ground slopes gradually down into a sort of basin, which prevents any part of the building, though of unusual height, being visible, except the tall turret-like chimneys, till you are immediately on the spot.

"So dreary an aspect as that presented by this deserted abode, and its locality, I never looked upon. The only trees within sight were a small phalanx of dark aboriginal firs, of hearse-like appearance, and two or three scattered dingy sallows, bending over the narrow rivulet, that bounded the enclosure which still retained the name of 'the garden.' But it was the name alone. All the beauties of the scene, if beauties it had ever possessed, had vanished long ago,

and left it not a wilderness, but a desert, the soil of which it was composed being a loose sandy stratum, too unfriendly to the progress of vegetation to encourage the growth even of weeds, except stonecrop and buglos. There were, indeed, a few rows of cabbages and potatoes, which the present tenants of the mansion (an old husbandman and his wife) had introduced between the stunted mossy shrubs, but these seemed to partake of the general character of the place, and presented an aspect so forlorn and deplorable, that it was impossible to look upon them without a persuasion that they suffered the actual pangs of starvation.

“The house, itself, though still large, has formerly been of far more considerable dimensions. It is built of small dusky red bricks, with barbarous-looking windows, partially grated with iron bars, and surmounted with white stone copings, now grey with years, and mantling lichens, crowned with wall-flowers, and waving anterrhinums.

“In the days of the Commonwealth Irmingland Hall was the country residence of that notable Round-head, General Ireton, who could scarcely have pitched on a domicile more in unison with his gloomy character.

“It was my hap to behold this dreary abode, for the first time, during a tremendous thunder-storm that overtook me one evening after sunset,

while I was endeavouring to recover the beaten track from which I had rashly deviated, for the purpose of tracing the remains of certain ancient enclosures, that rendered it evident to me that this plain had formerly possessed the dignity of a park or chase, but having been in these latter days given up to the barrenness of its own nature, it had gradually fallen back into its aboriginal state of commonage.

“From the silence and apparent loneliness that reigned within the desolated mansion, where my importunate summonses for admittance remained long unanswered, I was tempted to imagine that it was entirely without inhabitants; but my repeated and vigorous applications to the rusty iron knocker brought, at length, an ancient female, of very unprepossessing aspect, to the portal, whose antiquated garb, formal movements, and ungracious manners, savoured strongly of the Puritan school. Indeed, nothing less than the reflection that nearly two centuries had elapsed since the days of the Commonwealth could have persuaded me that she had not actually pertained to the household of Ireton himself, so much was her whole deportment in keeping with the costume and manners of that era and party. Loth as I was to relinquish this idea, I was forced to submit, on the score of chronological impossibility; but I afterwards learned that she was the last descendant of the

daughter of a marriage between Deborah Graves, the favourite waiting-maid of good Mistress Ireton, and Master Jonadab Coffin, tireman of the body to General Ireton's own honour.

"Her tawny orange petticoat and tight boddice, the material of which, though much faded, was certainly rich grogram; and the close black taffeta hood, lined with fur of royal miniver, that shaded her sharp features, had once pertained to the wardrobe of Mistress Ireton, and becoming the property of her handmaid, had descended in the way of family heirlooms, from mother to daughter, till they came into the possession of Judith Spiderwort, spinster, who now stood, arrayed in the same, beneath the old-fashioned doorway of Irmingland Hall, the unwilling object of my contemplations.

"The harsh dry tone in which she demanded my business afforded poor encouragement to my hopes of obtaining even temporary shelter, from the fury of the storm, much less did it promise a gratification to my desire of taking a regular survey of the interior of this den of desolation. Summoning, however, all my powers of persuasion to my aid, I showed my wet garments, and stating the great distance from any other habitation, I requested her to allow me to take shelter from the inclemency of the night.

"Mistress Judith listened with the most

stoical apathy, and observed in reply, 'that if I were benighted, or caught in the storm, I had no one to thank for it but myself, for she had seen me wandering about the common all day, and thought it was a pity I had nothing better to do;' she concluded with 'wondering at my boldness in knocking at the front door of Irmingland Hall, with as much assurance as if I had been a Parliament man.'

"Notwithstanding my mortification at her lack of courtesy, I was charmed at the confirmation which her mention of the word 'Parliament man' thus early in the colloquy, afforded to my pre-conceived idea respecting the politics of her ancestry.

"The rain, meantime, continuing to fall in torrents, I, as a direct appeal to female compassion, pleaded my ill health, to back my petition for admittance.

"'That,' she, with more truth than humanity, replied, 'could be no concern of hers,' and was taking actual measures for barring my entrance, by closing the ponderous door in my face, when an old peasant, of a remarkably primitive and amiable appearance, whom I had seen carting turf on the common in the morning, approached and said,

"'Sure, Miss Judy, you wouldn't turn a Christian body from the door in such a storm as this?'

“‘How do I know that he is a Christian?’ retorted the unbenevolent spinster, in a very *aigre* tone.

“‘If he be a Jew he shall not be shut out to-night,’ rejoined the worthy creature, ‘so be pleased to walk in, sir.’

“Miss Judith tossed her head, and vacated the doorway, leaving me at liberty to enter Irmíngland Hall. My desire of so doing having greatly increased during my parley with that obliging personage, who strongly reminded me of one of those uncivil dragons, so celebrated in ancient romance, as the sentinels whose business it is to guard the portals of enchanted castles from the intrusion of wandering knights.

“The antiquarian propensities, which have been remarked by some shrewd-witted persons of my acquaintance as my peculiar characteristics, were certainly in a considerable state of activity on the present occasion, and I accepted the good peasant’s invitation the more eagerly, on account of the opportunity it afforded me of examining the spacious hall, into which the great entrance door opened, my curiosity having been greatly whetted by the occasional peeps I had contrived to take of its richly carved cornices, during my conference with Miss Judith.

CHAPTER II.

"HAVING dried my wet garments by the bright blaze, which my humble host, Job Platten, raised for my accommodation, and made whatsoever observations I listed, I seated myself in the huge chimney recess, and accepted, with no slight satisfaction, the offer of a porringer of bread and milk, which honest Job said 'his wife should bring me as soon as she had done waiting on Miss Judith.'

" 'Miss Judith is your mistress then, my good friend?' said I, feeling a pressing desire of penetrating the mystery in which I could not but perceive that singular personage was involved. This was rather increased than solved by the character of Job's reply.

" 'My mistress, sir! No, no, I promise you no one is that but my wife. Miss Judy is a sort of lodger lady, who rents the two best rooms in the old hall, and has lived here ever since I was a little child.'

"My leading question having produced no better information, I asked, in plain terms, who Miss Judith was.

" 'Who she is, and what she is, I know not,' said Job, placing the tip of his forefinger against the side of his nose, with a very mysterious air,

‘but this I can tell you, that she never goes to church, and has a rare lot of outlandish nick-nacks that she sets a mighty store by, but I tells my wife that she has not got a greater curiosity among her trinkum-tranckums than herself.’

“‘Can you give me any description of her collection?’ exclaimed I, with that thrill of eager interest, which none but an antiquary can understand.

“‘No, sir,’ replied Job, ‘I am not clever enough to do that, but if Miss Judy chose to be obliging now, you might tea with her, in her own parlour, and see all her curiosities into the bargain.’

“In spite of her ungracious demeanour towards myself, my veneration for Miss Judith began to grow considerable. I regarded her in the light of a female antiquary, who, departing from the general frivolity of her sex, had retired from society, to enjoy, in the congenial solitude of Irmingland Hall, pursuits in which the most learned men have taken a pure and intellectual delight. My imagination pictured to me her precious hoards of

‘auld nick-nackets,
Rusty airn caps and jingling jackets,’

illuminated missals, mediæval manuscripts, black letter books, pictures, ancient prints, and doubt-

less medals, coins, and fibulas, verdant with the most sacred erugo.

“While I was both feasting and tantalizing my fancy with the idea of Miss Judith’s collection, I heard the harsh, dry voice of that mature maiden pronounce these welcome words in the passage, ‘Tabitha, tell the gentleman I will allow him to walk into my parlour and take tea with me, provided he is a decent person, and will promise to conduct himself seriously.’

“‘Assure Miss Judith,’ said I, in eager reply to this polite message, ‘that I am one of the most decent persons on earth, and was never known to conduct myself otherwise than seriously in my life.’

“Tabitha, after repeating my answer *verbatim* to Miss Judith, returned with a formal notification that I might enter her parlour; so, casting about in my own mind, like honest Teague, ‘how to make up a serious countenance,’ I followed the tidy Tabitha through the heavy arched door to the left, and crossing a wide brick passage, she lifted the latch of another door, like as a twin brother to that through which we had just passed, and ushered me into the awful presence of Miss Judith herself, who was sitting, in formal state, to receive me, in a high-backed, narrow-seated, antediluvian-looking elbow chair, which I should have esteemed a perfect unique in the creation of chairs, had she not motioned me to place myself

in its precise *fac simile* on the opposite side of the fireplace. While she was delivering some private directions to Tabitha, I amused myself with taking an accurate survey of the apartment, of which I could draw an exact delineation at this moment, though half a century has passed away since I saw it.

“The rooms in ancient houses have been remarked for the lowness of their ceilings, but this was an exception to the general rule, being full sixteen feet high. It was wainscoted to about the height of twelve, with black oak richly carved and panelled, which gave a very sombre appearance to the room, especially as the lofty, but narrow, windows, were partially shaded with heavy curtains of dark-green damask. The floor was covered with a moth-eaten carpet, worked hideously in cross-stitch, probably the labours of Mistress Ireton and her handmaids. The design was no less than a barbarous attempt at delineating the interior of Jael’s tent, in which that hospitable matron was represented in the very act of driving a tenpenny nail into the temples of Sisera, who was attired in the fashion of the Cavaliers, having yellow worsted curls on either side of his face, descending one below the other like so many sausages. His Vandyke ruff bore no proportion, in its gigantic breadth and depth, to the rest of his dress and figure, but resembled a selection of

pointed gothic windows assembled round his devoted neck.

“I was spared the contemplation of the nameless horrors of his countenance, for the moths of ages had committed unparalleled hostilities on his features, which devastation looked as though it had been the work of his hostess, whose attitude and visage were truly appalling, as grinning horribly *a crewel* cross-stitch smile, she brandished in one hand a sledge-hammer, such as

‘scarce two men could raise,
Such men as live in our degenerate days,’

while with the other she fitted the implement of destruction to the temples of her unfortunate guest.

“The names of the fair artist or artists had been snatched from fame by those same envious moths, though they had once been ostentatiously set forth in scarlet letters, in the four corners of the carpet, in one of which the date of the year, 1651, might still be distinguished.

“My attention was, however, suddenly diverted from this interesting specimen of female spirit and industry, by observing Tabitha engaged in sliding back one of the carved panels in the wainscot. My imagination was powerfully excited by a circumstance that so strongly savoured of romance. I turned my eyes with eager interest towards the spot, and experienced

a sensation of disappointment, on beholding instead of a winding stair-case or secret passage, a convenient niche, fitted up with shelves for the accommodation of glass and china. From the various stores which this snug receptacle contained, Tabitha selected a small highly polished tea-tray, made of the roots of the yew-tree, curiously inlaid with ivory, on which she placed two diminutive cups and saucers, each of which would contain about the quantum of three or four thimble-fulls of tea, but were of a form and material that would tempt any modern China fancier to offend, at least, against the article of the decalogue which forbids to covet, if not to an actual violation of that which prohibits theft.

“Then she drew forth a fascinating tripod tea-pot with a silver spout, and basket-work handle, two antique China beakers or tea-caddies, containing hyson and bohea, with which she flanked a silver-gilt sugar dish, embossed with grotesque figures in a variety of attitudes, the barbarous design and execution of which would have thrown Benvenuto Cellini into a fit of professional horror. There was a quaint receptacle for cream in the form of some outlandish Indian bird, exalted on a pair of long legs, with gilt webbed feet; and, to complete the *suite*, a dozen tiny apostle spoons, ostentatiously displayed on a China spoon-tray, with a silver tea-strainer laid discreetly across them, while at the right-

hand of Miss Judith was placed, on a tall stool, a diminutive bronzed tea-kettle over a silver lamp, that looked as if it had been part of the tea equipage of Noah's wife. I gazed with unfeigned reverence on the whole set-out, which in no slight degree enhanced my anticipations of the secret hoard of antiquarian treasures of which honest Job Platten had spoken.

"After I had concluded my scanty refection, I skilfully directed the conversation to such topics as I naturally imagined would prove most interesting to Miss Judith, in the covert hope of leading her to boast of her collection, but on that subject she manifested no disposition to speak, though I talked much of illuminated manuscripts, and books

‘Imprinted at the antique dome
Of Caxton and de Worde.’

"I discoursed in the most technical terms of ancient armour, bronzes, cameos, intaglios, medals, and coins, but her reserve was impenetrable. I even went so far as to boast of my own possessions in that way, and offered to show her my collection whenever she felt disposed to honour me with a call at my humble abode, ‘Rust Cottage.’

"To all this she listened with the most stoical apathy, and in return for my polite invitation, replied, with a marvellous lack of courtesy,

‘that for her part she was a strange creature, and seldom went out, and when she did, she made a point of never troubling people of whom she knew nothing with her company. And as for the things of which I spoke, she believed they were, for the most part paganish, or what was worse, popish trinkets, and if she took any delight in such toys, she had enow of her own, without running after other folk’s concerns.’

“Notwithstanding the obvious tenor of this obliging speech, I yet hailed, with no slight satisfaction, the fair Spiderwort’s allusion to her secret hoard of antiques, and besought her, ‘if she did not consider my collection worthy of her attention, at least, to favour me with a sight of hers, the fame of which I assured her had reached me, and had inspired me with the most pressing desire of beholding it.’

“At this, Miss Judith made up a prim face, and said, ‘she was not in the habit of shewing her curiosities to men-folks, especially to those of whom she knew so little.’

“In spite, however, of her prudery and feigned reluctance, I could perceive that she secretly panted to dazzle me with the splendour of her collection, and on my returning unweariedly to the charge, she at length yielded an ungracious assent to my request, and summoning the staid Tabitha to attend us, lest I should place evil constructions on her condescension,

the discreet spinster led the way to the upper part of the building.

CHAPTER III.

“THE shadows of evening had already begun to cast a deeper gloom through the dimly-lighted passages and staircase of this desolate abode, as I prepared to follow the slow steps of my conductress and her attendant nymph, when Job Platten advanced from the brick hall, with a candle in his hand, saying, as he approached, in a peculiar tone of insinuation,

“‘I’ve just been thinking, Miss Judy, that you’d be wishing for a light, for you’d be sorely hampered to show the gentleman your fine trinkums in the dark, as one may say.’

“‘Why cannot Tabitha carry it then?’ returned the spinster in her usual harsh, dry accent.

“‘Oh! Miss Judy, Tabby can carry it if you please; but I’ll just make bold to step up-stairs along with you, for you know it would not be quite so pleasant to stay below all alone, on account of the ghost.’

“‘The ghost!’ echoed I, ‘is this a haunted house then?’

"I asked the question for form's sake, for I could have sworn, from the outward physiognomy of the mansion, that the interior was duly provided with supernaturals.

"'Haunted, sir!' repeated the old man, glancing fearfully around him; 'why it is the most awful place between Norwich and the sea, for hobgoblins, and such like things, as no man can endure to look upon.'

"'Stint in your silly prate, old fool,' said Miss Judith, who somehow appeared to consider herself included in the latter class of the horrors of Irmingland Hall; 'I will answer for it you never saw anything here worse than yourself.'

"But here Tabitha, who did not choose to hear tamely such an insult offered to the meekest of husbands, interposed with becoming conjugal spirit, observing 'that her husband was not worse than other folks that she knew of, and she defied any one to say that he was so bad as the wicked man that used to live at Irmingland Hall once upon a time, and had never been able to rest in his grave, because he had had a hand in the murder of good king Charles.'

"'Good king Charles, indeed!' interrupted Miss Judith, with a scream of displeasure, 'I wonder the woman does not talk of *good* king Ahab, or *good* king Nebuchadnezzar.'

“‘Did you ever see the ghost of Ireton?’ demanded I eagerly, turning to Job Platten.

“‘Did I ever see him, sir?’ replied he; ‘I should like to know the day when he is not to be seen stalking up and down in his buff leathern jerkin and great jack boots. I have seen him at all hours, but especially about dusk. fall, and if I had remained in the great hall below five minutes alone, I should have had him setting himself down in the chimney corner, over against me, and staring at me with eyes as big as saucers.’

“‘Take care he is not behind you!’ exclaimed Miss Judith, in a tone that actually startled me as well as the timorous Job, who, dropping the candle in his alarm, clung to his spouse for protection, and she in turn to Miss Judith, who laughed in utter scorn, whilst I, giving the reins to my treacherous imagination, almost fancied I beheld a gaunt figure and grim countenance, peeping from behind a half-open door at the end of the passage.

“My start was observed by Miss Judith with malicious pleasure, and afforded her the opportunity of saying, ‘that, for her part, she had so good a conscience that she feared nothing,’ as a proof of which she offered to go down by herself to light the candle.

“I, of course, from a proper sense of manly propriety, proposed attending her, and she very

graciously replied, 'that I might accompany her if I were afraid of remaining where I was.'

"Job and Tabitha said, 'if the gentleman were not, they were,' so we all descended the great staircase abreast, no one caring to be in the rear.

"Having lighted the candle, we re-ascended the stairs, and traversed a wide and lofty corridor, into which the doors of many spacious but deserted rooms opened on either side, Miss Judith graciously permitting me to take a peep into each as we proceeded, though Job and Tabitha protested against such presumption, assuring me, 'it would certainly exasperate the restless spirit of "old Ireton" into some act of personal hostility against myself.'

"I was, I confess, somewhat chilled by the gloom and desolation that reigned in this ghostly ground, where the bat flitted at large, and the spider wove her web undisturbed, having succeeded lordly man as tenants of those once stately apartments.

"At length we reached the *sanctum* where Miss Judith's treasures were deposited. I was all in a flutter, with eager expectation, when that worthy maiden, drawing from her capacious pocket a huge bunch of keys, proceeded to open the folding doors of a large japanned cabinet, and after undoing lock and bolt, and pressing

on secret springs, at last, with a look of triumph, displayed her collection.

“That collection was certainly made up of very queer relics, though not indeed of the precise description I had prepared myself to behold. I subjoin a list of a few of the articles for the amusement of the reader.

“An Antique Awl used by the celebrated Robin Wisdome in working at his trade as a shoemaker, and one of his Lasts.

“A White Ivory Scratch-back; Ebony Ditto, broken off at the wrist and lacking a thumb.

“An Apple-Scoop made of the leg-bone of some small animal, curiously carved and set in gold.

“A Pair of Cuff-Bands marked O. C., which Miss Judith averred to be the veritable cuff-bands worn by Oliver himself at the signing of the king’s death-warrant. N.B.—They were ink-spotted in several places, and not over clean, but these circumstances, it seems, enhanced their value.

“An Eye-Brow Comb.

“A Silver Spice-Box, in the form of a nut-tree, growing out of a flower-pot, which unscrewed and contained a grater, ginger, and mace. The nutmegs were enclosed within the fruit.

“Queen Elizabeth’s Prayer-Book, bound in white satin, magnificently embroidered with flowers in bullion and coloured silks, all much faded and tarnished. The letters E. R., surmounted with a crown, were introduced in the centre of each medallion. N.B.—A piece of looking-glass was artfully inserted within the cover of the book, but discreetly concealed beneath a gilded slide, on which was delineated Hope, Faith, and Charity.

"Ireton's Leathern Doublet and a Thumb-Ring that had formerly appertained to the same personage.

"A Lady's Pocket-Perspective in a shagreen case, about four inches in length, ingeniously contrived to hold a gold fruit-knife a pair of scissors, tweezers, a diamond pencil, black lead ditto, a tooth-pick, and a very small set of ivory tablets, all within the circumference of half-a-crown.

"A set of Lackered Toilet-Boxes in the form of a hen and chickens, one of which, containing a pineushion, was tastefully fixed on the hen's back, and was still thickly studded with Mistress Ireton's antiquated pins.

"There were many other articles equally quaint and curious, but as it would be tedious to describe them all, I will content myself with saying that those which I have enumerated, may serve as fair samples of Miss Judith's treasures.

"I, of course, though somewhat disappointed at the nature of her collection, exhibited a proper proportion of gratitude to the female antiquary for the entertainment I had received, and she was so well pleased with my behaviour on this occasion, that when we returned into her parlour she produced, from the afore-mentioned niche in the panelling, an antique pint decanter, which bore a strong family resemblance to all the old-fashioned vinegar cruets I ever saw, and actually filled two long-legged, splay-footed, high and narrow green wine glasses with cherry brandy, and presenting one to me, very demurely emptied the other herself, protesting, at the

same time, 'that she never drank anything stronger than table-beer at any time, unless she had been unusually fatigued.'

"Two or three repetitions of her cordial, so far thawed the ice of Miss Spiderwort's native inhospitality, that she graciously told me, in reply to an observation of mine, expressive of some uneasiness respecting the continuance of the heavy rain, the lateness of the hour, and the distance from the nearest town, 'that I might pass the night at Irmingland Hall, provided I were not afraid of sleeping in a haunted room.'

"I thankfully availed myself of the permission, and followed Job Platten, and his spouse, who acted as joint chamberlains on this extraordinary occasion (for neither ventured to remain downstairs alone) to the only one of the twelve spare sleeping-rooms that could boast of a bed, and that bed I could perceive, by the look of horror with which Job and Tabitha regarded it, they would not have passed the night in for all the revenues of the Irmingland Hall estate.

CHAPTER IV.

"As soon as they had withdrawn I proceeded to take a regular survey of the furniture, which

consisted of a bedstead as ancient as the days of Queen Elizabeth, with a lofty back, and canopy of black oak, carved in a most florid style, with grotesque figures of popes, cardinals, bishops, monks, and friars, in extravagant caricature. Heavy curtains of dark purple harateen drew round the canopy of this bed, and gave it a most dismal and hearse-like appearance.

“In a wide, deep recess by the fire-place, which fronted the bed, was a terrific painting of the Witch of Endor, raising the spirit of the prophet Samuel, by one of the ancient masters. The figures were as large as life, and though the colours had suffered from damp and dust, it was still possessed of very powerful interest.

“Over the broad chimney-piece was placed a very large looking-glass, in a ponderous ebony frame surmounted with a death's head and cross bones in carved ivory; there was also a japanned dressing-glass on the old-fashioned toilet-table. Four high-backed narrow-seated chairs completed the inventory.

“Having finished my observations, I placed my candle in a sconce on the mantel-piece, and took possession of the bed. It was to no purpose, however, that I endeavoured to court repose. There was a feverish excitation on my spirits, which prevented me from composing myself to sleep, and I counted the ticking of the great clock, on the stair-case, till its heavy repeated

chime proclaimed the hour of midnight. There was a sort of superstitious chill stealing over me that was strangely increased by that sound.

"My imagination was somehow affected by the painting of the Witch of Endor, and she appeared to have laid a spell upon me that prevented me from withdrawing my attention from the subject. I fancied at length that the misty cloud which concealed the rising of Samuel was in motion. My eyes expanded with terror, and I had no power to avert them from the spot.

"The motion increased, the features of the sorceress became agitated with the sybilline fury, and the countenance of the pale melancholy king of Israel reflected the horror of mine, as the shadowy veil, heaving with convulsive violence, rose to a gigantic height, and discovered beneath its mysterious drapery the general outlines of the form of man.

"I would have cried out at this terrific sight, but had lost all power to ejaculate a single sound. The figure beneath the cloud made strong efforts to burst the vapoury shroud in which it was enveloped.

"My fears increased with every struggle. At length, by a prodigious effort that appeared to shake the whole building to its foundation, the veil was rent asunder, and the spectre, not of Samuel the prophet, but of General Ireton, stood confessed in the array of a military Puritan,

and, stepping forward, stalked across the room with measured strides, then fronted the bed, and drew back the curtains with a menacing gesture.

“At first I doubted the reality of this apparition, and asked my own reason whether it were not the coinage of a frightful dream. But it would not do: the grim regicide stood before me in steel cap, starched band, rusty breast-plate, buff jerkin, and leathern belt, from which descended a sword that might have suited the hand of a Goliath. His huge jack-boots creaked audibly, even when he was stationary, but when he recreated himself with stalking across the room, his heavy spurs jingled, and his iron guarded heels clanked at every step.

“The mysterious fascination which the painting of the Witch of Endor had so recently possessed, appeared now transferred to the spectral figure of the regicide, from which I vainly strove to avert my eyes. After regarding me, for some minutes, with a fixed malignant stare, he strode up to the chimney-piece, and with one puff from his ghostly lips, extinguished the candle, but there was a livid light playing round him, which made his person visible amidst the darkness that obscured the rest of the apartment. I did not think it had been possible for my terror to have admitted of increase, till the spectre advanced close to the bedside, and poking his pale, ghastly face

between the curtains, said in a hollow, unearthly voice,

“ ‘What business have you in my bed?’ ”

“I strove to plead Miss Judith Spiderwort’s permission as an excuse for my intrusion, but the words stuck in my throat, and I could not, by any means, articulate anything more than ‘Spider— Spider— Spider—,’ struggling in vain to pronounce the Christian name and final syllable of my hostess’s surname. The ghost took umbrage at the repetition of the word.

“ ‘Spider!’ quoth he angrily, ‘callest thou me a spider?’ ”

“And without paying the slightest attention to my apologies and explanations, he sprang upon the bed, and very unceremoniously attempted to push me out of it. My indignation at such uncivil treatment overcoming my terror, I struggled in my turn to expel this unwelcome bed-fellow, but the grim regicide had decidedly the advantage in the contest, and at length succeeded in planting his knees on my breast, and griping my throat with his gaunt, long hands, he avowed his intention of suffocating me. And suffocated I should most probably have been had not my desperate efforts to free myself from the grasp of my ghostly enemy caused me to awake, at the critical moment, when the pressure of the real intruder, an over-grown black tom cat, that had taken up its sitting on my breast, had well nigh

deprived me of breath and animation, besides growling, spitting, and swearing furiously, every time I attempted to move.

“My candle had burned down in the socket, and filled the room with a stifling vapour; but the storm had subsided—the moon was shining brightly through the high casement, and everything appeared in a state of perfect repose, yet the cold damps of terror stood on my trembling flesh, and it was some seconds before I ventured to direct a glance towards the painting of the ‘Raising of Samuel,’ or the ebony-framed chimney-glass, lest I should behold the appalling features of the defunct regicide reflected thereon. Much less did I like the idea of quitting my bed to expel the actual cause of my unrest. When at length I re-collected my fluttered spirits sufficiently to do so, I unclosed the casement, and after inhaling the fresh cool air for a few minutes, I returned to my pillow, and soon sunk into a profound slumber, and passed the remainder of the night as peaceably in the haunted chamber at Irmingland Hall as if I had been sleeping in the white tent bed in my own snug dormitory at ‘Rust Cottage.’”

XII.

A MYSTERIOUS LODGER THIRTY YEARS AGO.

AN uncommonly dull season at the demi-semi-fashionable bathing town of Scratchby had concluded, leaving things in a more melancholy state of stagnation than it had found them. The few migrating idlers who had ventured thither fled before the chilly blast of early autumn; the proprietors of furnished villas and apartments were in despair. Tradesmen scarcely dared look at the gazette lest they should behold their own names among the bankrupts; the milliners walked about with rueful looks, dressed in their own unsold finery, wondering how it was to be paid for; and the owners of bathing machines were ready to drown themselves from their own steps!

Dismal November with all its fogs had set in; and if November in London be proverbial for its gloom, what must it be in a small borough

corporate, on the eastern coast of England, where people have nothing to amuse them but watching the arrival of herring-boats, or the departure of sprat-fishers, the flight of sea-gulls, or the periodical ebb and flow of the tide.

The most inveterate gossips of Scratchby became at length weary of propounding to each other the question, "*What news?*" on account of the eternal reply, "*No news!*"—when a sudden excitement was given to their suspended animation, by hearing that a stranger had actually arrived—how, when, or whence, no one knew; but he occupied the best apartments at the principal hotel, rose at twelve, breakfasted at one, dined at eight, excommunicated steel forks, ordered dishes with unheard-of names, and called for wines, the mention of which made the landlord's wig stand on end! Moreover he burned wax-lights, and read no newspaper but "*The Morning Post*," at that time a strictly conservative organ: "by all which tokens it was plain that he was a person of consequence," said the landlady, who had once filled the situation of lady's maid in a nobleman's family.

The landlord declared he was quite satisfied respecting guests, if they paid their reckoning, which the stranger had insisted on doing every night. The daughters of the house thought it very singular that the gentleman had no bag-

gage: yet his dress was scrupulously neat, and fresh every day, though no one could discover what became of the clothes he took off.

The young ladies of Scratchby "were sure the mysterious lodger at 'The Mermaid' was somebody extraordinary. He was so tall and thin, and interestingly sallow, and had such expressive dark eyes and whiskers: besides, he wore no cravat." Had his advent occurred in 1820 instead of 1830, he might have been mistaken for Lord Byron, or the Great Unknown, or Prince Leopold, looking out for a second wife at Scratchby; as it was, they only ventured to surmise him into the ex-Duke of Brunswick, one of the Bonapartes, or some titled sentimentalist, in search of disinterested love.

It is the disposition of the world at large, much more the world *in little*, to surmise the worst of every one; but the mysterious lodger, though a man without a name, and without baggage, was evidently the master of a well-filled purse, which, in these virtuous days, compensates for the lack of everything else! The favourable report of the state of his finances and fashionable habits having transpired, there was a meeting of the Scratchby exclusives, to debate whether the mysterious lodger should be admitted to the society of "the head persons of the borough," at which the majority considered mine hostess's standard of aristocracy as quite orthodox;

breakfast at one, dinner at eight, French dishes, Rhenish wines, silver forks, wax lights, and "The Morning Post," must be indubitable symptoms of high breeding.

After the adventure of Lord A—— B——'s incognito, these worthies were disposed to look upon every pedlar, who carried a smaller pack than usual, as a peer of the realm in disguise. So they came to the conclusion that the mysterious lodger at "The Mermaid," was an itinerant of rank, whose friendship it would be desirable to cultivate, and determined to favour him with a visit; but, as it is rather awkward to call on a person without knowing his *name*, they summoned mine host of "The Mermaid," and put him to the question ordinary and extraordinary.

Mine host professed his ignorance respecting his lodger, observing "that it would be wastly impertinent to request any one who ordered so handsomely, and behaved so *genteelly*, as to pay his reckoning every night, to give an account of himself." "Besides," added he, "had it been a possible thing for any one to do, our mistress, gentlemen, would have found out his name before he had been in the house six hours, for she is a special person at making discoveries."

"It is only a walk to the post office, at the worst," soliloquised Mr. Fox, the Recorder, taking up his hat.

"Yes, yes, sure to find it out there," rejoined

the sagacious Mayor, nodding his head, and all the corporation nodded their heads also, while the great man of the town, Mr. Loftus, the banker, whistled "We are a' noddin'."

Mr. Fox presently returned with a blank countenance. "The gentleman at 'The Mermaid' had never received a letter!"

The exclusives were now in greater perplexity than ever, respecting the incognito who "breakfasted at one, dined at eight," etc., etc.

"You shall wait upon him with the subscription book of the reading-rooms, Mr. Hawk," said the Mayor, after a pause, "and request him to add his name to the list."

"And if he ask what papers and periodicals we take, be sure to say, 'The Morning Post,' 'St. James's Chronicle,' and 'The Morning Herald,' 'Blackwood's Magazine,' and 'The Quarterly,'" added Mr. Loftus.

"We'll write by this day's post, and stop 'The Sun,' 'The Globe,' and 'The Star,'" said Mr. Fox, "and we'll order 'John Bull,' and the tory county paper."

"Very good," observed the Town Clerk; "and do you, Bonnywell, present my compliments to your lodger, and say I wish to speak to him."

Mine host, who had formed a shrewd idea of his guest's peculiarities, undertook the office with anything but alacrity.

His mysterious lodger was reposing at full

length on a hard narrow sofa, with a crumpled red-and-yellow chintz cover, dosing over "The Morning Post," when he entered and delivered Mr. Hawk's message.

"Hey! what d'ye say? a new sort of fish in town?" yawned the object of universal interest.

"No, sir; Mr. Hawk the Town Clerk's compliments, and he will be happy to speak to you."

"What does he want? let him send his business."

"Send his business! why, to be sure, sir, you don't know what sort of a gentleman our Town Clerk is."

"No; nor do I wish to acquire any knowledge of him; I am acquainted with too many troublesome persons already!"

"Well, sir, to be sure, sir, it's all very true, sir, but pray, sir, what am I to say to Mr. Hawk, sir?"

"Anything you like, except that I shall be happy to see him—for I have an especial dislike to busy bodies!"

"And you wish him to send his business, sir."

"No; I do not wish to be plagued with it; but, if he insists upon it, I suppose I must."

Mine host descended to the committee below, and, with some amendments, repeated the ungracious speeches of his mysterious lodger.

Mr. Hawk looked white ; the corporation and the Mayor looked at Mr. Loftus.

“Person of consequence, no doubt,” observed the latter, who did not rightly understand the difference between persons of consequence and consequential persons. “Here, landlord, take the book of subscribers to the gentleman, and say, Mr. Loftus and the gentlemen of Scratchby desire their compliments, and hope he will do them the honour of adding his distinguished name to their society at the reading room.”

“Society at the reading-room ! add my distinguished name (what do they know of that I wonder ?) to such a set as this !” muttered the mysterious lodger, glancing his eye quickly over the list of the little great of Scratchby ; then contemptuously tossing the book from him, he resumed the study of “The Morning Post.”

The message, if message it could be called, was repeated to the eagerly-expecting conclave.

“Are you certain he observed my name ?” demanded Mr. Loftus.

“And mine ? and mine ? and mine ?” inquired the Mayor, Mr. Fox, and every member of the corporation, and genteel resident in the town, from class A down to about class D.

“Don’t you think we had better commit him

as a vagrant or ill-disposed person, Mr. Worshipful?" suggested the attorney.

"And then you can compel him to give some account of himself," observed the offended Town Clerk.

"Of what can we accuse him!" asked the chief magistrate.

"Of being a Radical," said Mr. Loftus.

"But he reads 'The Morning Post,'" rejoined the curate.

"All art and grimace," said Mr. Hawk. "I'll wager anything that he has some of Cobbett's trash in his possession, if he were now searched."

"Farmer Rickman's stacks were fired the night before last, you know, gentlemen, by some maliciously-disposed person, whose *name is unknown*," said the attorney, significantly.

"And whom are we to suspect, unless it be a suspicious person?" rejoined Mr. Hawk.

"Very true," said Mr. Loftus, and it was only yesterday, that I received, myself, a threatening letter, signed 'Swing.'"

"Indeed!" exclaimed the whole conclave.

"Then, sir," said the attorney, "you may depend this mysterious lodger at 'The Mermaid' is neither more nor less than that *ignis fatuus* villain, Swing himself, and perhaps cousin-german to the Irish desperado, Captain Rock, whom no one has yet been able to catch."

This speech was received with universal

applause. The corporation were now far more desirous of hanging the mysterious lodger, than they had been, a few minutes before, of cultivating his acquaintance. Mine host was summoned and cross-examined as to his guest's mode of spending his time; when, to their infinite satisfaction, Mr. Bonnywell admitted that the party suspected went out about six o'clock on the evening the conflagration took place, and, though he had ordered dinner at the usual hour, did not return until after midnight.

"A plain case, a plain case!" was murmured through the room.

"Have you ever observed anything of a suspicious nature lying about in his apartments?" queried Mr. Fox.

"No, sir," replied mine host; "no, sir, not so much as a nightcap; and our Betty is of opinion he does not wear such a thing."

"Had you not better summon Betty, Mr. Mayor, to give her evidence?" asked Mr. Fox.

"Certainly, by all means," responded Mr. Worshipful; and Mrs. Betty, smirking and curtsying, yet frightened at the awful assemblage, entered the room.

"Well," said the Mayor, with an encouraging nod, "what have *you* to say of the suspicious character, who has taken up his abode in this house?"

"Why, lauk, sir, I doesn't wish to say any

thing against the gentleman, though he be rather a 'spicious person, as you say."

"Mr. Hawk, take down that Betty Brown, the chamber-maid, considers him a very suspicious character," said the Mayor.

"Oh, pray, my Honours, don't go to set down anything that I should say against the gentleman's character," exclaimed Betty, in great agitation. "I am sure he has always behaved in the genteelest manner to me, giving me a shilling every evening when I brings him his night candle, and what was still genteeler than that, when he gave me half-a-crown, the day of the fire, to go and buy him a sixpenny box of lucifers, and I told him it only came to threepence, he wouldn't take none of the change, but said, 'Molly, it will do to buy you a ribbon, for you are a very honest girl to bring me back so much money, for I never got a box of lucifers so cheap before, and I use a good many,' says he."

"*Now*, gentlemen," exclaimed the Mayor, "I think we may congratulate ourselves on being instrumental in bringing such a notorious delinquent to justice. You find, by his own voluntary confession to Betty, that he has long been addicted to the infernal practice of purchasing lucifers to assist in his demoniacal amusement of incendiarism. I say that hanging is too good for such a villain."

"Very true," observed Mr. Loftus, "and it is

a pity the laws will not admit of his being burned alive."

"Sir, I quite agree with you," said Mr. Hawk; "Mr. Mayor, you had better commit him on strong suspicion of having been the author of the late conflagration."

"Very good," replied the Mayor; "but I must summons him before my worshipful self first, you know, and examine him on the charge of having maliciously and wilfully set fire to neighbour Rickman's stack, and take down the depositions in black and white of the witnesses."

The Town Clerk called for pen, ink, and paper, and made out a summons against the mysterious lodger at "The Mermaid," and ordering Dick the constable to be sent for, the Mayor empowered him to serve it without further delay; but to their infinite disappointment, the said constable, after searching every nook and corner of the hotel, returned with the information, "that the person for whom it was intended was no where to be found!"

"Absconded by all that's circumstantial!" exclaimed Mr. Hawk.

"Lauk, gentlemen!" simpered Betty, "he is only gone out for a walk, as he do every day into the country, to look about him a bit, and he's sure to be home to dinner, because he have ordered some of his heathen messes, to be ready by eight o'clock; for I heard him tell our

missus, he chose some '*mutton-go-tawney*' soup, and a homlet, and some *petticoat-lays*, which are nothing in the world but some little bits of lamb-chops, and he said he would have a *stew-flea*, by way of pudding; so you may be sure, my Honours, he will be home to eat such a dinner as that; for if he don't, I am sure nobody else will, without it be the French fiddler what sleeps in the coal hole."

"It is my opinion, that this person ought to be pursued in all directions, without loss of time," said Mr. Hawk.

And so thought the Mayor, and every member of the corporation who was possessed of a horse, or could afford to hire one, and knew how to play the equestrian; and within half-an-hour all the cavalry of Scratchby was in motion, with Mr. Loftus at their head; for Mr. Mayor was a very poor manager of a horse, and preferred bringing up the rear in his comfortable stanhope.

Although there were several bowery green lanes in which a fugitive might have sought temporary shelter from the formidable pursuit of the civil authorities, they disdained to diverge from the straight line of the turnpike road, and had not proceeded more than three miles, before they overtook the object of their suspicion; nay, more, detected him in the very act of striding across the pales of Sir Mowbray Mortimer's park.

Mr. Loftus, being a resolute man, instantly leaped from his saddle, and with the Town Clerk, the Recorder, the Constable, and one or two of the most courageous members of the corporation, succeeded in surrounding, and taking the suspected incendiary into custody, whom, though an elegant and fashionably dressed man, they loaded with every vituperative epithet which their indignation at his evil deeds could suggest.

The mysterious lodger protested against the violence and illegality of their very extraordinary proceedings, in terms which indicated his familiarity with the technicalities of the bar, to the infinite astonishment of his arch enemies—the Town Clerk and the Recorder, who were not prepared to find a professional brother in a villainous incendiary.

The Mayor now coming up, insisted (as he had passed the bounds of his own jurisdiction) on taking the object of their suspicions before Sir Mowbray Mortimer, who, being a very active J. P., and a strict game preserver, was not very likely to look favourably on the trespass and character of the mysterious lodger.

Sir Mowbray hastened to give audience to these bustling civilians and *incivilians*, secretly wondering for *which* of his sins he was punished with the infliction of their visit. However, as the aristocracy are the “politest” people in the world, he received the Scratchby *consequentials*

with all the courtesy of "a person of consequence," and, instead of asking their business, waited for them to unfold it.

"Sir Mowbray Mortimer, sir," commenced the Mayor, "I dare say you are surprised to see me here so far out of the bounds of my jurisdiction; but, sir, as a brother magistrate, I beg to state that I and the members of my corporation left Scratchby this afternoon in pursuit of the notorious incendiary, Swing, whom we happily caught on your manor, Sir Mowbray, in the illegal and felonious act of striding over your park pales!"

"Indeed, sir!" exclaimed the baronet whose curiosity now began to be excited; "and where is he?"

"Sir, he is waiting, handcuffed, in the hall, under charge of Dick, the constable."

Sir Mowbray having signified his wish to see the object of suspicion, Dick the constable was desired to bring his prisoner forward. The latter advanced with greater alacrity than could be expected from a person under his circumstances. The surprise and consternation of his captors may be imagined, on perceiving a comic and familiar glance of recognition exchanged between their prisoner and the baronet, both of whom indulged in a hearty burst of laughter.

"Why, my dear Littleton, what riots have you been engaged in, since you were last here,

to entitle you to those bracelets?" exclaimed Sir Mowbray, pointing to the handcuffs.

"So far from engaging in riots, my dear fellow," responded the prisoner, "I, having heard what bellicose people the men of Scratchby were, eschewed their society altogether till the arrival of my fellow commissioner, Mr. Boreham Brushall, might enable me to inquire into the abuses of their corporation with sufficient effect. But in the meantime, Mr. Mayor and the rest of them having determined to be beforehand with me, I suppose, accuse me of being no less a person, Mortimer, than that notorious will-o'-the-wisp, Mr. Swing!"

"On what grounds, may I ask, have this worshipful assemblage brought such an accusation against my friend here, who is the Honourable Blackstone Littleton, of the Inner Temple, one of the commissioners empowered by government to inquire into the abuses of corporate bodies?" asked Sir Mowbray, as soon as he could conquer his risibility.

"Will Mr. Littleton be pleased to account for his absence from 'The Mermaid' between six in the evening and an hour past midnight, on the night of the conflagration on Farmer Rickman's premises?" said Mr. Hawk, the only one who was not struck speechless by the ominous name and business of the mysterious lodger.

"Mr. Littleton did me the honour of dining

with me at seven that evening, and indulged me with his agreeable company till past the hour you mention," said Sir Mowbray.

"But, sir, the purchase of the box of lucifers still remains to be explained," said the abashed, yet pertinacious Town Clerk.

"Sir," replied Mr. Littleton, "I always use lucifers to ignite my cigars, for which purpose I purchased a box of those articles on the day of which you speak. I happen to have it about me, gentlemen, and beg to produce it for your satisfaction, still unopened. And now, gentlemen, I hope when I, in conjunction with my colleague, Mr. Brushall, (whom I expect tomorrow) proceed to inquire into corporation abuses, you will be able to return as satisfactory answers to *our* queries, as I have done to *yours*!"

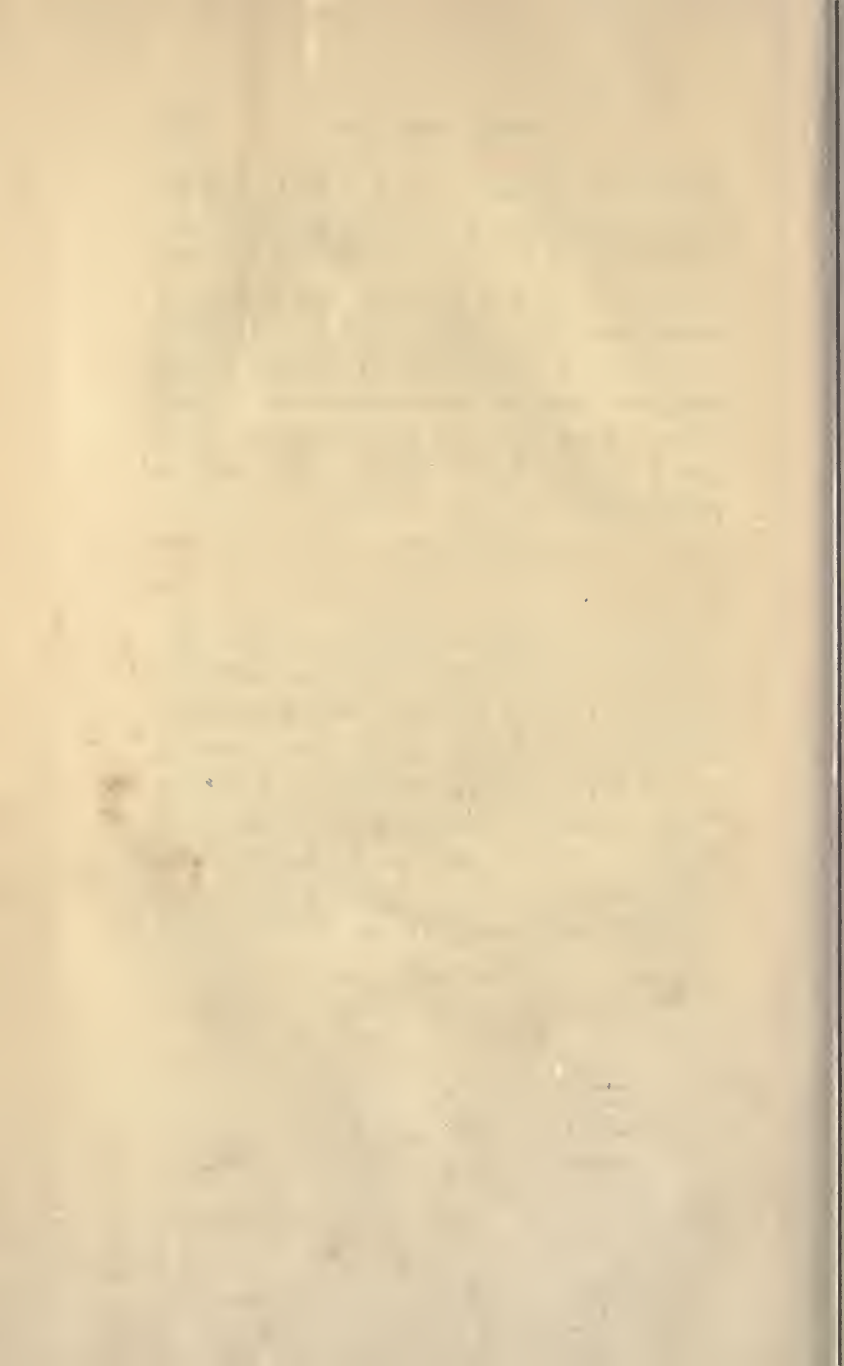
The Mayor and corporation, who had dreaded the long threatened advent of the commissioners of inquiry, worse than the cholera, stood aghast at the adventure, while Dick, the constable, scarcely needed their sign to release the wrists of the Honourable Mr. Littleton from the handcuffs.

"Indeed, sir," apologized Mr. Fox, "if you had only been kind enough to add your name to the list of our reading-room, we should have been aware who you were, and conducted ourselves with proper respect."

"I am sure, sir, if we had taken you for a gentleman, it would have been very different," whined the Mayor.

"And if you had suspected me of being a commissioner of inquiry," said Mr. Littleton, "I suppose I might have purchased lucifers enough to put the whole county in a blaze, without being called to an account for it, so that I had not thrown too much *light* on *your* proceedings."

For the benefit of such of my readers as may be curious respecting the development of minor mysteries, I beg to state that Mr. Commissioner Littleton's portmanteau having been mis-sent, he had been under the necessity of borrowing articles of dress of his friend, Sir Mowbray Mortimer, at whose mansion he had regularly performed his mysterious toilet, while he had been the "mysterious lodger" at "The Mermaid."



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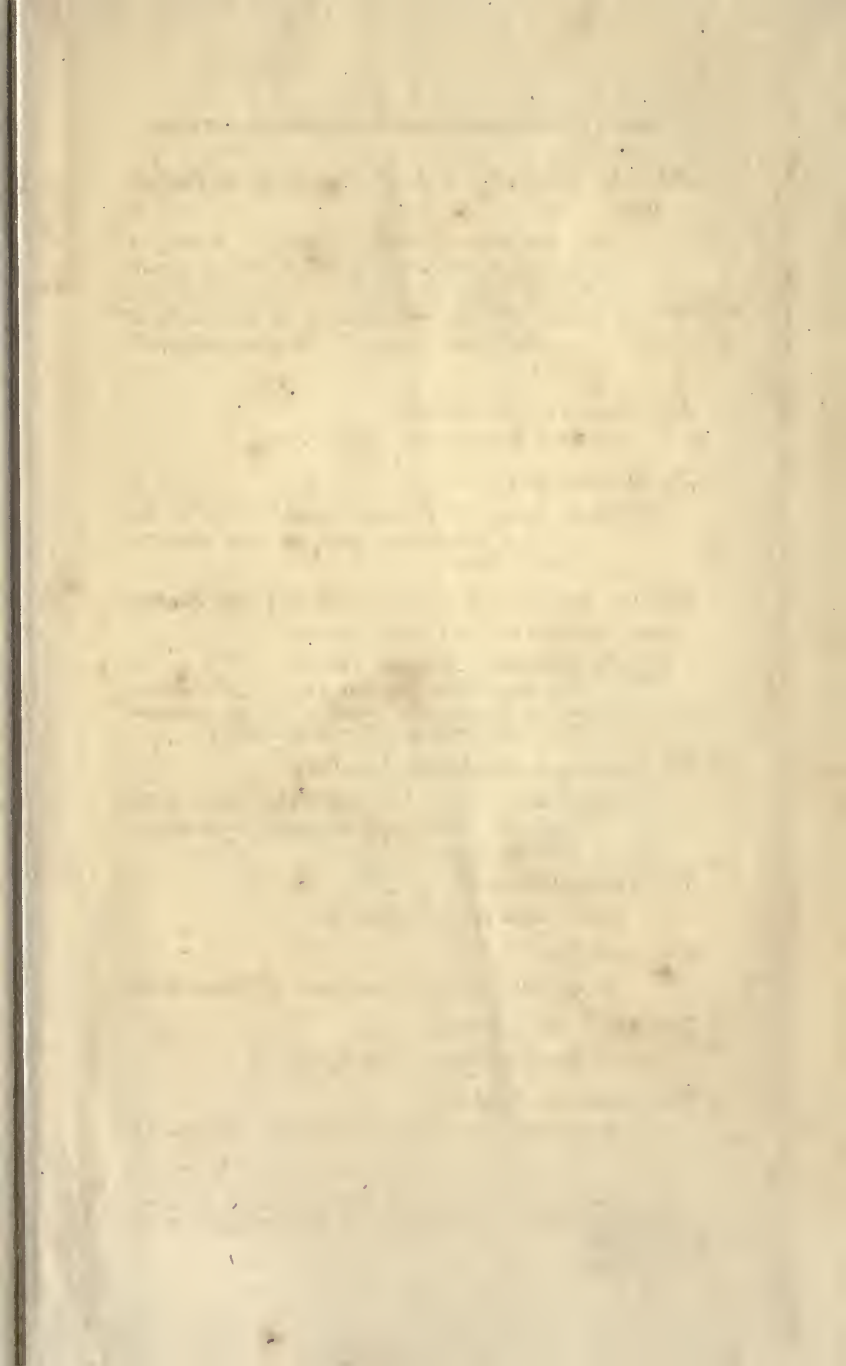
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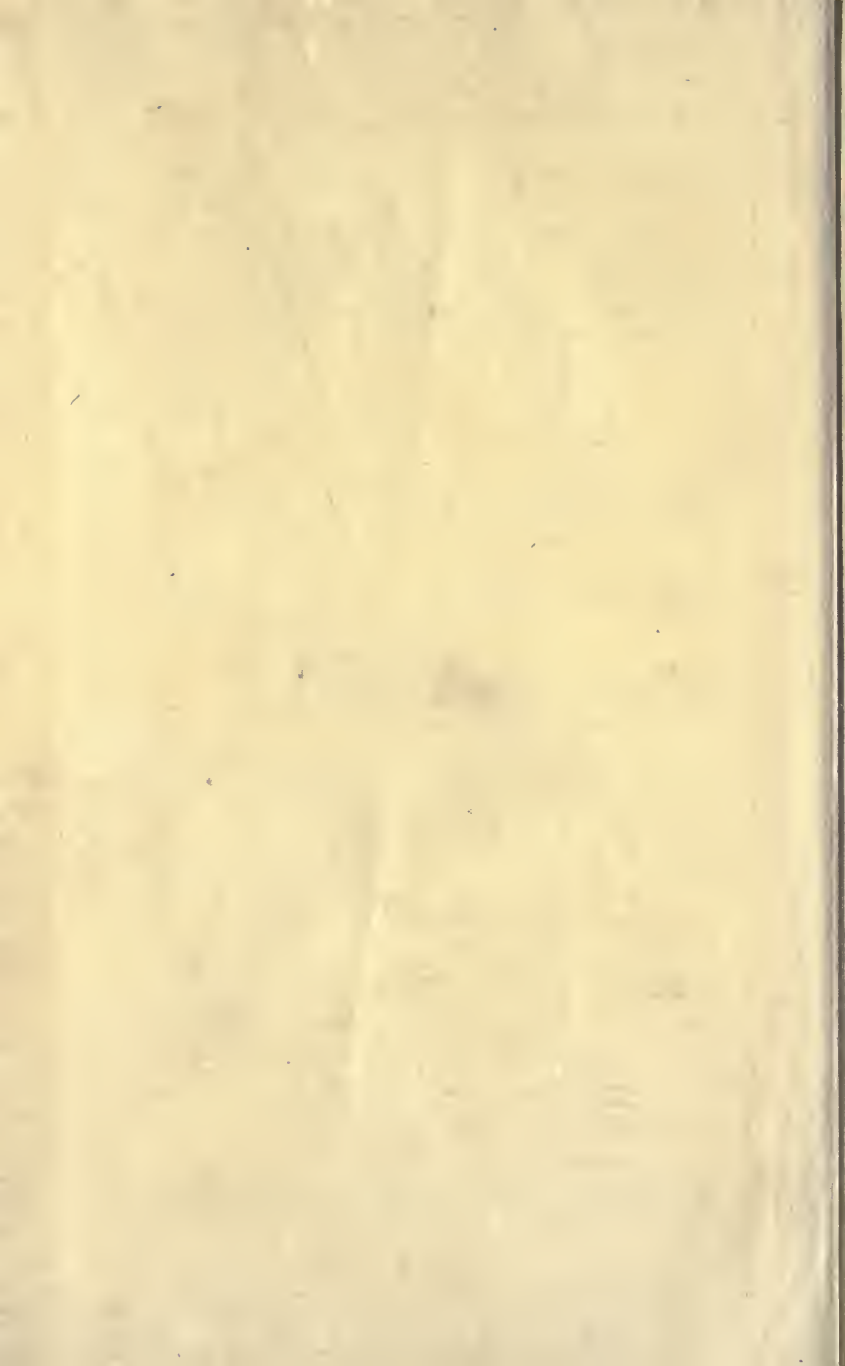
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